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ABSTRACT

The Student Text begins with a comparison of Eastern and Western World Religions. The three interrelated Abrahamic faiths are compared with Hindu-Buddhist traditions. Subsequent chapter titles are: "New Religions," "Religion and Morality," "Religion and Science," "Religion and Human Life," "A Historical Perspective" and "Getting Together." An "Annotated Bibliography" follows the easily-read chapters. Analysis Materials is a booklet with a wide variety of items, and instructors can select those best suited for students given the time available. There are case studies, multiple single-page readings (with questions for discussion) as well as illustrations designed to trigger thought and motivate student-produced artwork. The three case studies are "Beginning and Change in Religion," "New Age Religion" and "Religion and Exercising Influence." The last helps students spot abusive or deceptive procedures wherever they are found. Selections not duplicated for students make excellent teacher resources. Often study about religion is neglected because instructors feel unprepared. The Teacher's Manual distinguishes between proselytizing and teaching about religion in an empathetic yet objective manner. Topics also include what to tell students about personal beliefs and how to secure school and community support. Other suggestions are on teaching about "abhorrent" practices, conflict among religious groups, and "historical events" accepted by members of only one faith. There are lesson plans, student activities, and evaluation procedures as well as an "Addenda." All Teachers' Press kits are open-ended, incorporating the authors' on-going work. Current technology makes "textbook lag-time" unnecessary. (AA)

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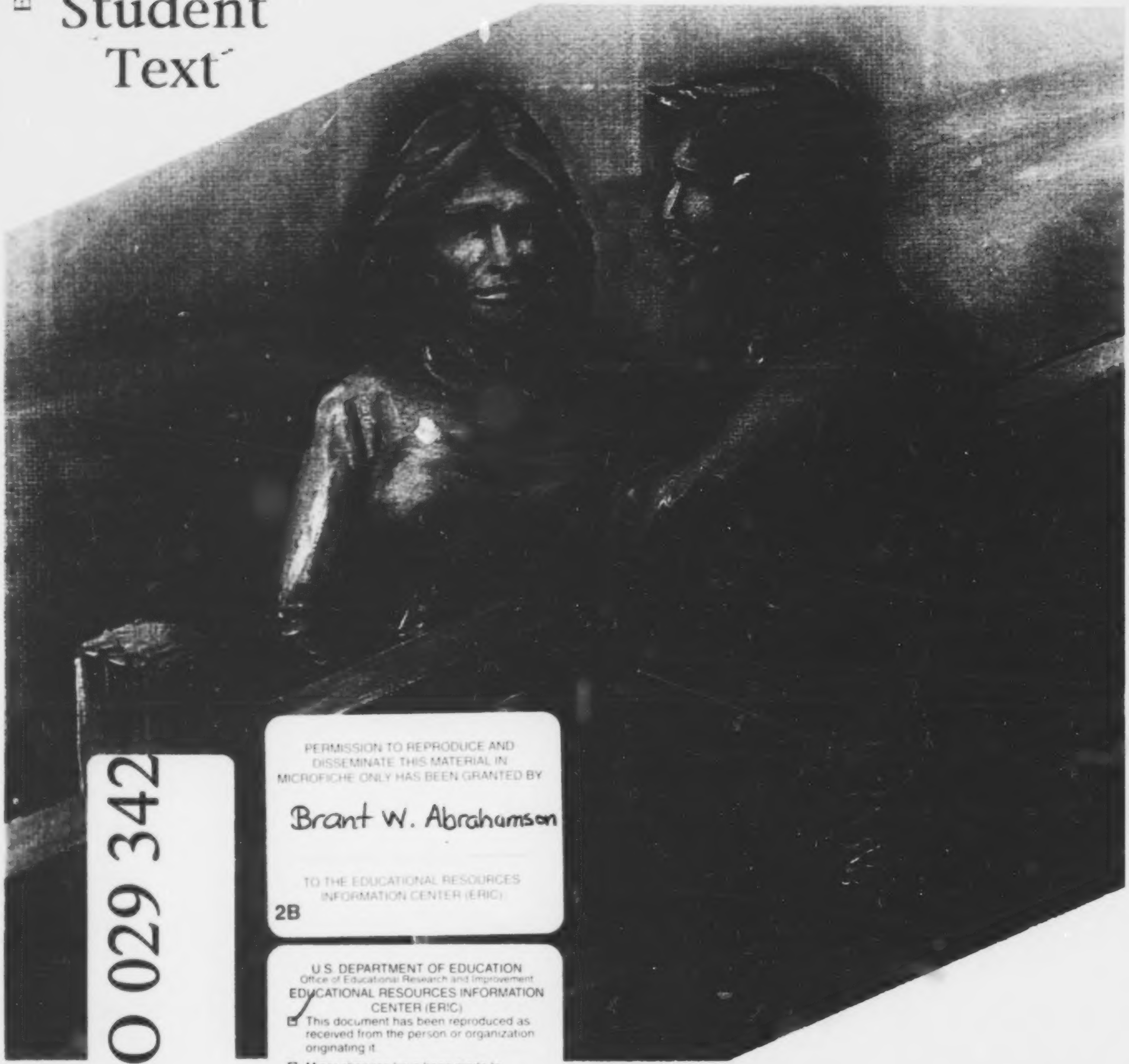
Thinking About Religion

From a Global Perspective

Student Text



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Brant Abrahamson
Fred Smith

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the 1960s we began teaching directly about religion from a global, empathetic and critical thinking perspective. Since that time we have been encouraged by many people.

We particularly want to thank the thousands of students at Riverside-Brookfield High School (R-BHS, Riverside, Illinois) who have been active participants in creating the unit. To a significant extent they are collectively responsible--through their questions, responses to our materials, etc.--for the shaping of the unit over the years.

We received continued encouragement from our Departmental Chairpersons over the years, Glen Branson, Francis Dombrowski and William Jirkovsky as well as from many other staff members at R-BHS. Our long-time Superintendent, Dr. James Trost, fostered a university-like atmosphere at R-BHS where creativity was both encouraged and supported.

Grace Abrahamson's editorial skills have been central to the success of our efforts. John Abrahamson produced the paintings that illustrate a basic idea from each of the eight chapters. See page 56 of the *Analysis Materials* booklet for more information on his "thinking about religion" artwork.

Jan Goldberg is current R-BHS lead-teacher of the course in which Chapter One and parts of other chapters were developed. We work with her on a continuing basis.

Brant Abrahamson
October, 1997

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Chapter One: THE RELIGIOUS VIEW OF LIFE

INTRODUCTION

What reasons do people have for living? Why does daily conduct matter in the long run? People who follow a world religion tend to give the following answers to these questions:

1. There is a universal spirit, god, deity or divine entity.
2. This divinity has established an eternal moral order that, in part at least, can be known to human beings.
3. People have the duty to follow eternal moral dictates.
4. This human conduct has long-term significance. Most religious people believe that people have an essence, or soul, that survives death. What happens to this soul depends upon moral conduct during life.

This is our four-part definition of religion. It is a life understanding that unites Jews, Christians and Muslims with Hindus and Buddhists as well as the followers of many newer faiths. All believe in a universal intelligence that provides a framework for human living. Defined in this way, religious truth is more recent in origin than occultism.

(A note on dating: We will use BCE and CE when referring to dates. BCE means "before the common era," and dates are the same as using B.C.; CE, or common era, refers to the same years as A.D. BCE and CE are used because these terms are not specifically linked with one religion as are B.C. and A.D.)

HISTORY OF RELIGION

Going back into BCE times, occultism--the belief in many surrounding spirits or forces-- probably was the first human attempt to understand the nature of the universe. Some Neanderthal people buried their dead with ceremonies 40,000 years ago. These burials, cave paintings and other kinds of evidence indicate that stone-age peoples had worked out concepts of surrounding spirits.

Gradually some groups began to rely upon one all-purpose spirit or god. By 500 BCE people in two parts of the world had evolved concepts of a universal divinity for all people regardless of culture. Religion as a source of truth and inspiration that we know today had appeared.

As described, religious authority had two principle centers of origin. Judaism, Christianity and Islam all began in the Middle East--the areas just east of the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. These religions share many basic concepts about the nature of the eternal moral order since they have common roots. Together they are called the major Western Religions. Hinduism and Buddhism began in South Asia, and they are referred to as Eastern Religions. South Asia includes the modern nations of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

EASTERN RELIGIONS

In the East, Hinduism began developing when holy men--whose names are not recorded--evolved pantheistic views of god. Pantheism means that the world and all parts of the universe are elements of the divine. All is god, or "The One." If all is part of The One, there can be no ungodly actions as these are understood by followers of Western faiths. Instead of seeing actions as good (godly) or evil (ungodly), holy men devised a system of appropriate actions for all forces and living creatures including humans. Appropriate actions for humans vary, Hindus believe, according to age, sex, and caste. Caste is an extremely strict social class system determined by birth. Castes, in turn, are divided into thousands of sub-castes called varna which determine one's occupation and lifestyle. Appropriate behavior, or morality, is dictated by how closely one follows the rules set for one's age group, sex, caste and varna.

These beliefs are linked with the idea of reincarnation or the transmigration of souls. Hindu holy men believe that souls have existed since the beginning of time. Every living creature has a soul. As one particular body dies, the soul transfers to another body in a cycle of birth, growth, death and then rebirth. If a person acts in appropriate ways, at death the soul will be elevated into the body of a higher caste member. Eventually--probably after countless lifetimes--it will be purified and will merge with The One. This merging often is pictured as similar to a raindrop falling into the ocean. If a person does not act appropriately, the soul will be reborn into a lower caste member or into a lesser creature.

Buddhism began as a reform movement of Hinduism about 500 BCE. Early Buddhists were disturbed by ideas associated with caste and varna, the elaborate Hindu priestly ceremonies, and the idea that one's soul had to endure countless lifetimes. Instead, Buddhists came to believe that humans could break out of the cycle of rebirths during the present life by achieving enlightenment.

One achieves enlightenment by acquiring an understanding of the essential nature of the universe. Over the centuries hundreds of Buddhist sects have appeared, the founders each having developed their own ideas on how enlightenment can best be achieved. The classic view is to understand that life is suffering and that suffering is caused by desire. To eliminate suffering, one must gain control of her or his desires and live in a modest, non-offensive way.

These Hindu and Buddhist ideas have been worked out in great detail over the centuries in many holy books. Hindu sacred literature includes the *Vedas*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* that may be similar to an encyclopedia in length. Buddhist holy literature includes many volumes called sutras.

Hindus and Buddhists place no special emphasis on dead bodies. The dead are burned soon after death. According to traditional belief, cremation helps release the soul. One does not see many cemeteries in Eastern Religion lands.

WESTERN RELIGIONS

Since Jews, Christians and Muslims believe in one universal god, they don't need to name the divine. In English, Jews and Christians say "God" or "The Lord" (although Jehovah sometimes is used). Muslims refer to "Allah," a word meaning "The God" in Arabic. God, or Allah, is seen as the maker and overseer of the universe, but not one with it. This is a two-part division, or dualism. The universe, or humans at least, became corrupted by evil. Dividing good (God) from "bad" is a second dualism.

Think of a landscape artist who creates a flower garden. This beautiful garden is beautiful at first but becomes ugly, rank and entangled with weeds. It was created beautiful by its maker but has a somewhat separate existence and is no longer attractive.

This degrading process is explained in several ways. Speaking broadly, Jewish people often think in terms of the inevitable results of separation. Some Christians and Muslim believers have the same view. Others assume that an anti-god, or devil, separated from God and is now attempting--with temporary success--to turn the heavenly garden into an "evil" tangle of out-of-control plants. (Comparisons are designed to help us understand an idea. No matter how effective in this regard, no analogy proves that the idea being explained is right.)

Regardless of how explained, for the followers of Western religions the earth is a battleground between forces of good and evil. To be moral, a person must reject evil and side with god, or the good.

If successful, Christians and Muslims believe that their souls keep their individual essence at death and join God in heaven--which is outside of the created universe. Evildoers are excluded. (Jewish people may or may not share this view. Some believe--along with non-religious people--that rewards and punishments are limited to this earth.)

In this system only human beings are believed to have souls. And, each person has a separate soul which comes into existence at conception, some time during pregnancy or at birth. Unlike followers of Eastern faiths, members of Western faiths believe that each eternal soul has only one lifetime to side with God. Each life--and (in some faith variations) each fertilized egg--is assumed to have an eternal significance.

Western religious people generally believe that there is one standard of conduct for everybody regardless of age, ethnic background, social class or other groupings. For instance, Muslims believe that both men and women should dress modestly. Christians and Jews believe that the Ten Commandments apply to everyone.

When compared to Hindus and Buddhists, Western religions are based on small amounts of literature. The *Pentateuch* consists of the first five books of the Old Testament of the *Bible*, and it is one central source of the Jewish faith. Christians consider the *New Testament* Gospels to be particularly significant because they contain historical references to the words of Jesus. Christians believe that Jesus is the savior sent by God (the central story of this Western faith). Muslims believe Allah's moral order is most completely revealed in the *Koran*. The *Koran*, Muslims believe, was dictated by an angel of Allah to the prophet, Muhammad (570-632 CE). The authors of the *Bible* and *Koran* are considered to be divinely inspired. Some believers see the holy books as word-for-word revelations. For other believers holy books embody *moral truth*. They are not designed to be a substitute for scholarly understanding of history or science.

Today, becoming a religious expert may require years of training in all faiths. People may study individually, in groups, or at colleges and universities. Religious leaders may learn the original languages of the authors of the holy books. They may study the cultural settings in which the books were written and interpretations that previous scholars have made.

In neither the East nor the West are religious authorities united in their understanding of their written holy books, or scriptures. There are disputes concerning interpretations, translations as well as what should be considered "holy."

Members of Eastern faiths commonly believe that there are many paths to divinity while Western religions are much more exclusive. A member of one Western faith cannot, at the same time, be a member of another. For instance, a Christian can convert to Islam, but not be both at once.

Even details of one's beliefs often are considered fundamentally important. As a result, religious wars have been common in the West even though the combatants have the same general view of the divine entity. People--often relying upon the same holy book--have battled one another. As in the past, religious wars today most often are fought in those parts of the world most influenced by Western faiths.

To prevent religious leaders and followers from abusing others, concepts of religious freedom and separation of church and state have arisen in the West. In nations such as the United States, governmental agencies are prohibited from using their positions, agencies and programs to promote or favor religion in general or any one faith in particular.

END NOTES

Most religious people remain loyal to their traditional faiths. They worship with their friends and relatives under the guidance of religious leaders who are representatives of large, long established organizations.

Since human cultures change, world religions do also. Religious freedom in the United States and elsewhere enables new faiths to evolve. Understanding new religions is the next subject.

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Chapter Two: NEW RELIGIONS

INTRODUCTION

New religions often are started by people who have dynamic personality traits. They have *charisma*--the power to charm large numbers of people--that makes them leaders.

Usually these charismatic religious founders have a new twist to an established religious pattern. A section of a holy book will be interpreted differently than others interpreted it. Elements of different religions may be woven together. The leader may claim to have received a new revelation--or to have found an efficient way of communicating with a divine entity.

Joining some new religious groups may leave a person's life basically unchanged. One may continue to live in the same community, continue to visit friends and relatives. She or he may keep old political and recreational interests.

Members of other groups, however, may have lifestyles that set them apart from the larger community. They sometimes live together as a family or separate themselves from the world in other ways. Followers can be urged to donate most of their labor to the organization or give their savings to leaders. Some acquire a very distinctive appearance. And, a few leaders ask their followers to participate in acts that outsiders consider senseless, immoral or illegal. Religious groups with these general features commonly are called *cults.* New religious groups--whose founders are still alive--may or may not be cult-like.

Religious innovators often are single-minded people. They tend to focus their time and energies on what they believe to be a new understanding of the universe. Moreover, growth must come from proselytizing since there are no preexisting members. Given these circumstances, religious pioneers may believe that the "ends justifies the means," that making their "Truth" known justifies methods others see as deceptive, or mentally/physically destructive. This outsider reaction can go to the point where converts are seen as "brainwashed."

Focusing upon such anti-cult reactions, some people in sociology and other social scientific fields bristle when they hear words such as *cult* or *brainwashing.* In their view these terms are indications of religious prejudice, like using racial or ethnic slurs.

We are not trying to pin emotion-laden labels on religious groups regardless of how long they have existed. Rather, we want students to be able to evaluate group characteristics and beliefs so rational decisions can be made. Given personal values, how worthy is the person or organization of one's support?

To answer this question we will discuss some general principles in this lesson. In the next we will consider specific guidelines the authors believe should be considered before--or during the very early stages of involvement--in a religious, or secular, group.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

First, answers to the question, "Why do we exist?" are quite varied. A new religion that seems illogical and perhaps evil to outsiders almost certainly gives a new convert meaning and purpose, at least initially. Perhaps she or he is trying to deal with personal problems such as a failed love affair. Or, the individual feels "without direction" or is disillusioned with the outside world. Or, the person feels pulled in opposing directions by science and his or her family religion. In these kinds of circumstances, a new faith may seem superior to all others, perhaps even "perfect."

Second, in our roles as social scientists we cannot say what is "true" or "false" religious doctrine. We cannot tell individuals whether they should or should not join any religion--or any other organization for that matter. (There are political, economic and psychological cults in addition to religious ones.) We can only observe and identify beliefs and activities--and describe what effects they likely have on people. Note we are discussing professional roles. As private citizens, social scientists often promote religious and/or secular causes.

Third, as citizens of a multicultural society, we can practice being tolerant toward belief systems with which we do not identify. Perhaps we can even learn to understand the life-transforming significance sacred stories and rituals have for the people who believe in them. We can grow as individuals as we temporarily suspend judgment to expand our mental horizons. We should also remember that our beliefs may seem strange to people raised in a different tradition.

Fourth, we can avoid prejudice without falling into a moral relativism that makes us afraid or ashamed to make judgments. Critical thinking is a focus of this unit, and it can be used when considering religion just as in other aspects of living. People can become deluded, irrational or exploitive in all fields, including religion. Charlatans will pretend to be the kind of authority we admire, and religion is of central importance to many people. Unscrupulous individuals often use general trust in religious leaders for their own benefit. And as mentioned, whole organizations--religious as well as secular--may be psychologically (and physically) destructive.

We are particularly vulnerable to psychological trickery when our lives are in transition or under stress. The late teenage years and early adulthood is one such time. One commonly separates from parental authority, often leaving home at this time. In this situation young adults can be lonely. Friendly gestures may be welcomed. As a consequence, proselytizers of all sorts--secular leaders, commercial advertisers as well as religious innovators--see opportunities. Persuaders step in as childhood in-group authority recedes!

END NOTES

We want to avoid bias. Nonetheless, young adults are open to a wide variety of influences. Some of these will be beneficial to them in the long run. Others will not. Parents have a right to be concerned about who is influencing their newly-adult children as well as the methods of influence being used.

Authorities cannot isolate young people from outside influence nor should they. But they can, however, provide information so that decisions can be made as rationally as possible.

In the following lesson we will focus upon guidelines for responding to people who try to convince us to accept their views. The principles are framed in the context of evaluating "new religions," but newness is relative to the person reading the material. What is "new" depends on one's perspective.

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Chapter Three: GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

Social scientists--in their professional capacities--cannot determine what is "true" or "false" religious doctrine. Nevertheless, they can use their expertise to categorize (sort out) different religious beliefs as was done in the first lesson that compared Eastern and Western faith system. Scholars also can observe the methods that are used to secure and maintain followers, determining the degree to which these correspond to specific cultural standards of moral behavior. Finally, they can come to general conclusions about how a particular group likely will affect members' lives on earth.

Using social scientific guidelines is important for people making life transitions--as young people are. One argument used by cult leaders is that one cannot judge a group until he or she has joined. This notion is dangerous and false. It may be difficult or impossible to judge objectively after becoming involved, and physically or emotionally difficult to leave.[1]

Consider this comparison: A young adult wants a car. She thinks about Fords, Saturns and other makes as objectively as she can. She mulls over the pros and cons of each. Finally she buys a Saturn. Now she is much less objective. She has spent thousands of dollars! To justify this investment to herself and others, she may feel that the car is almost perfect, and all others vastly inferior. The same mental process can operate when we join groups. Judging the worldly consequences of becoming a member of a religious group is difficult, much more difficult than judging a car. But, one can use guidelines that will help prevent a decision that is regretted later.

Guidelines for religious seekers can be put into three categories: conversion methods, members' lifestyles, and organizational structure.

Conversion methods can differ immensely from one group to another. Some established groups make almost no attempts to convert outsiders.

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[1] If one wants to attend a particular meeting, fine. We are not promoting the idea that it's good to be ignorant. But, stay in a back corner where one can clearly analyze what it going on. Refuse invitations to "come to the front" where emotional manipulation by leaders is much easier.

That is, they do not proselytize except as they train their children. At the extreme, one almost has to be born into the faith to be a member. But generally, Western religious groups seek converts, especially new ones. Persuading people to join often is a central focus of group activities. The nature of these efforts may or may not be moral in the view of outsiders.

Almost all try to create a warm, caring atmosphere for newcomers. Leaders know that people will be more likely to join a group if they feel welcome, wanted and needed. If a person comes from an environment that lacks affection, she or he may quickly become emotionally attached to a group whose members seem compassionate. What the people believe likely will be of secondary importance--if thought about at all.

Humans need affectionate response and recognition. If the home, school and other community groups are cold or uncaring, a person may join a group not clearly knowing organizational goals or sources of "truth." Then--after one is emotionally attached--clear thinking about these beliefs may be difficult.

GUIDELINES

Guideline One. *Check out a group's beliefs before becoming emotionally attached.* Creating a "loving" environment is effective psychology that any group can use. Reverend Jim Jones created such an environment for his followers before leading over 900 of them to their deaths in Guyana in 1978! A positive emotional feeling is not evidence that the group's doctrines are divinely inspired. Be on the lookout for deceptive forms of psychological pressure. Be aware of propagandistic trickery designed to keep potential converts from thinking logically. Common methods include:

1. Isolating a person from family and friends. This can be done physically and mentally. As one example, a new recruit may be strongly encouraged to spend a weekend at a spiritual retreat where leaving the group is difficult and no outsiders are present. The person is then immersed in a continuing cycle of emotionally exciting and physically exhausting activities. Or, never left alone--an idealistic member often being assigned to the new or potential recruit.

2. Saying nothing about beliefs that might be "red flags" to outsiders. Deny that such unpopular doctrines exist or are significant. Focus on whatever will sway views. Perhaps even lie, using an "ends justifies the means" rationale.

3. Dwelling on the wickedness of the world and on "evil" human desires. Manipulate people through guilt feelings. Stress that this group alone can offer personal or social salvation, and this glorious mission overrides doubts concerning particular tactics.

4. Manipulating recruits into revealing things they have done that were wrong. Sharing such information can provide emotional release, but doing so is dangerous. Unscrupulous leaders may use this data to blackmail later on. It is a way to keep an individual within an organization after idealistic visions fade. Or, having recruits participate in acts or rituals considered immoral by the larger community would also bind them to the group through guilt.

5. Wearing followers down physically so they cannot think straight. There may be endless rounds of song singing, chanting, dancing, marching or manual labor. In some groups malnutrition also is a factor. These are ways of altering consciousness, of producing "mystical" experiences.

6. Endlessly repeating group beliefs and strongly discouraging (or physically preventing) consideration of other views.

7. Using human "romance tendencies." The idealized stereotyping that attracts lovers is not limited to secular situations. Intense admiration for a leader--hero worship--often is a reason people are attracted to a new faith. The founder has charismatic traits others interpret as divine inspiration. There is the temptation to believe completely in somebody others see as morally frail, manipulative or at least very human.

Procedures that shut off thinking are particularly powerful when used together and combined with high praise for acting in "right ways" and saying "right things." If a person can spot psychological manipulation, she or he is in a position to ask: "Why do I want to join this group? How are members trying to influence me? What do I know about the belief system? How will my life likely change if I become involved?

Traditional religious bodies in the United States generally emphasize learning. The majority of private schools and universities are--or began as--institutions supported by religious groups. These religious organizations may sponsor temporary retreats, and they may enable highly religious members to "dedicate their lives to God." That is, they have monasteries and convents. But, monks and nuns often are educators of one kind or another. They do not try to keep people from thinking logically. And people whose religious views change are free to leave.

Guideline Two involves *maintaining a balanced lifestyle.* Most traditional religious authorities agree with this rule. They support private family life. They approve of members finding their own jobs. They encourage members to belong to a variety of community organizations in addition to the church, synagogue, mosque, shrine or temple. Although traditional leaders may make recommendations, members are given much leeway to decide how much time, money and effort they are going to donate to a religious group.

Exploitive leaders demand almost complete allegiance. They may require followers to live in isolation from nonbelievers. They may make visits with parents and other relatives difficult. They may require that one works for organization-owned businesses while receiving very low wages. Or, they may require that almost all of one's paycheck or property be signed over to the group. They may encourage their followers to beg, or tell lies to sell unwanted flowers, books or trinkets or to get donations.

From a follower's standpoint, these actions provide evidence of faith. One is testifying to outsiders whose world is viewed as corrupt and worthy only of contempt. If outsiders, including family members, cannot be converted they are to be manipulated or avoided. To a non-believer, such acts seem bizarre and evidence of exploitation.

Often young adults are prime targets for conversion or exploitation. High school and college-age people are trying to establish personal identities separate from parents, teachers and other traditional authorities. In the process of breaking away from childhood dependencies, the young often question their family religious leader only to find that they are unsatisfied emotionally. Proselytizers try to fill this emotional void. Young adults and others can begin by wanting to be free and end up as slavish followers.

Guideline Three. *Be careful of joining a movement that is the personal instrument of one or a very few individuals.* People grow old. Unchecked power tends to corrupt them as it does others. Occasionally they have mental or emotional breakdowns. If a group is dominated by one individual, what will happen when this person is no longer directing activities? Most new religious groups do not survive long after their charismatic founder is gone. More important is the lack of internal checks and balances. What happens when no follower can say "Stop!" if an all-powerful leader begins making "insane" demands? When one worships within an established organization, there are built-in protections that are lacking when there is one sole authority.

Guideline Four. *Observe closely how money is spent.* Are financial records open for member inspection? Or, are followers told to "trust the leadership"? The *con* in con-artist stand for *confidence.* Governmental agencies do not supervise finances of religious groups to any significant extent. Many cynical people use religion simply to avoid having to account for the money that they collect.

Do leader lifestyles serve as models for their followers? Or, do they live in luxury while encouraging donations from followers living at much more modest levels? Do they seem to be living on an economic level consistent with the publicized goals of the organization and their own stated salaries?

Such questions are answered fairly easily if leaders live in the same communities as followers. The lives of others--such as radio and TV personalities--cannot be readily observed, however, and in the past some have been shown to be leading lives very inconsistent with their messages to followers. Authorities claiming religious status may not be what they seem on the surface.

Guideline Five. *Proceed slowly and with care. Secure data from a variety of sources. Avoid overgeneralizing.* Consider the advice in this lesson, for example. A particular guideline should not be used in isolation. To illustrate, members of the Salvation Army stand on street corners and in store entryways before Christmas seeking donations. But, the Salvation Army is an established institution. Administrative costs are low. Leaders do not live in luxury. Most of the money collected does go to needy people.

All new religious groups do not fall apart when the founder dies. Christian Science was founded by Mary Baker Eddy over a century ago and successfully continued, as did the Seventh Day Adventists. so has the Mormon church (Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints) that Joseph Smith and Brigham Young started earlier in the century. Every religious group now established was started by particular people at particular times and places. What methods did they successfully use?

END NOTES

Religious belief commonly transforms people's lives through shared stories, rituals and other aspects of community life believed to have divine significance. New religions--with their novel understandings, practices and ways of living--may be condemned without investigation. We want to avoid bigotry yet make judgments that will help us determine what organizations are worthy of our support or respect.

To make rational, empathetic decisions about new religions, we need to use the same rules as when judging other groups. These include checking out beliefs before becoming emotionally involved, maintaining a balanced lifestyle, observing how money is spent and knowing the dangers of becoming an unthinking "slave" of any one person--regardless of her or his claims of divine guidance.

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Chapter Four: RELIGION AND MORALITY

SOURCES OF MORALITY

Religious people believe there is a universal spirit, god or divine entity that has established an *eternal moral order* which can be known to humans, at least in part. People, in turn, have a duty to follow the dictates of this eternal moral order, and their response has long term consequences for them in this world and/or for their soul.

Is this "eternal moral order" as perceived by humans consistent from one world religion to another? Do Eastern and Western faith systems teach a common core way of behaving?

Authorities such as Huston Smith say "Yes!" For over fifty years Smith has participated in and been an observer of one world religion after another. He agrees that modern science has made obsolete ancient religious attempts to explain the origins of the world. He also thinks that "class structures, gender relations, and the like" that are described in holy books "must be reassessed in the light of changing times and continuing struggles for justice." However,

> ...if we single out [world religion] conclusions about reality and how life should be lived, they begin to look like the winnowed wisdom of the human race....We should avoid murder, thieving, lying, and adultery [sex with another person's spouse]....Proceeding from this ethical base to the kind of person we should strive to become, we encounter the human *virtues* which are basically three; Humility, charity and veracity [truth-telling]. Humility...is the capacity to regard oneself as fully one, but not more than one. Charity shifts the weight to the other foot; it is to consider one's neighbor to be as fully one as you are. As for veracity, it extends beyond basic truth-telling to a sublime objectivity--the capacity to see things exactly as they are, freed from subjective distortions. (*The Illustrated World's Religions*, page 246.)

Secular experts see the matter differently. They say the values Smith attributes to religion are near universals. These ways of behaving describe how in-group people tend to act toward one another regardless of religious belief.

James Q. Wilson says that from an evolutionary (scientific) standpoint the mechanism underlying human moral conduct is the desire for attachment or affiliation. This is true of "all species that nurture their young after birth."

> That behavior is especially strong among humans because the human infant requires such a long period of nurturance. It takes years of parental care for the human brain to develop sufficiently to make complex intellectual activities possible, for example, figuring out the theory of evolution.
>
> Theories of natural selection and inclusive fitness explain why caring for one's own young has been adaptive--that is useful--for the human species. People who care for their young leave more young behind than those who do not; to the extent parental care is under genetic control, caring parents reproduce their genes in the next generation at higher rates than do uncaring ones. Evolution has thus rewarded ("selected for") people who were biologically predisposed to spend endless hours on the uncompensated, "irrational" tasks of tending their offspring. Had it not, there would soon have been no offspring to care for, and I would not be writing this book and you would not be reading it.
>
> ……
>
> What evolution selects for is not behavior, whether moral or otherwise; it only selects for mechanisms that produce a behavior or predispose an animal to it. (*The Moral Sense*, pp. 238-39.)

Theodore Schick, Jr. writing in an anti-religion journal says religious people:

> correctly perceive that [commonly agreed upon] moral standards are required for the proper functioning of society. But they erroneously

> believe that God is the only possible source of such standards. Philosophers as diverse as Plato, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, George Edward Moore and John Rawls have demonstrated that it is possible to have [an accepted moral standard without relying on religion.] ("Morality Requires God...or Does It?: Bad news for fundamentalists and Jean-Paul Sartre." *Free Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 3, Summer, 1997, page 34.)

Notice that these experts--and many others--agree that people around the world have similar ideal behaviors towards in-group members. Morals are much the same. Differences lie in cause/effect relationships.

Do the enduring religions preach the same basic virtues because these have a genetic base? Are enduring religious traditions a reflection of divine commands? Are both positions correct? Does a divine cosmic source exist and work through evolution only? --Through both evolution and inspiration? --Communicate morally through inspiration only?

Are these questions important? Yes, if one believes that souls exist. But, there is no way to unite people on this matter, so why not focus upon earthy consequences? A focus upon reasons for morality seems to divide people. If religious and non-religious people basically can agree on what desirable behavior consists of, why get worked up about causation?

On this earth, isn't the problem of out-group treatment more urgent?

THE DARK SIDE OF HUMAN EMOTIONS

There is a dark side to human emotions. If there is a common religious morality for fellow-believers, there also are near universal ways of viewing outsiders.

Huston Smith says "A balanced view of religion would include witch-hunts and inquisitions, pogroms and persecution, the Christian Crusades and holy wars of Islam. The catalogue [of hateful acts] would have no end" (*The Illustrated World's Religions*, page 11). Think of street gangs. From an in-group perspective members are "unselfish" as they risk their lives in battling rival gangs. But is such "unselfish" behavior good? Isn't our earthy job one of enlarging identifications so that we can avoid "witch-hunts and inquisitions, pogroms and persecution"? Avoid drive-by shootings on city streets? Keep nationalism from resulting in war?

One doesn't have to know individual people to emotionally identify with them. If feelings of togetherness depended upon personal knowledge we could have no world religions such as Islam or countries such as the United States. Given encouragement, children can grow up feeling attached to a particular nation, a particular religion, *and to all of humankind.*

Democratically-oriented people can work together almost regardless of their individual religious beliefs. As one example, review the human rights campaigns of the mid-20th Century. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a Baptist Christian minister, but many of the people in the marches he led were from other faiths, or were secularists. Belief in racial equality made religious differences almost irrelevant.

Two final questions: Must people hate in order to love? And, must we have promises of eternal rewards and (perhaps) punishment to be "good" on this earth?

Question One: Must we hate other countries to love the ones in which we live? Must we hate other faiths in order to love our own?

Notice the extent to which history texts focus upon human conflict! Fairly clearly, since people find hateful attitudes easy to acquire; they must have a genetic base. But, are they a necessary foundation for love? No enduring religion makes this claim. For instance, "Muslims report that the most inflexible image of Islam that they encounter in the West is that of a militant religion spread primarily by the sword. They see this as a prejudice....It is a stereotype, forged by people who have seen Islam as their enemy" (Huston Smith, page 168).

Almost without exception psychologists also say no. For instance, Gordon Allport states that:

> Positive attachments are essential to life. The young child could not exist without his dependent relationship on a nurturant person. He must love and identify himself with someone or something before he

> can learn what to hate. Young children must have family and friendship circles before they can define the "out-groups" which are a menace to them. (*The Nature of Prejudice*, page 25.)

Many religious authorities and social scientists go far beyond this statement. They say that hating tends to stifle one's ability to love. Alternatively, as one focuses upon positive associations with outsiders, angers and hatreds diminish.[1]

Question Two: Does morality depend upon belief in a soul and associated rewards or punishments beyond physical death? On this earth pleasure/pain methods are associated with animal training. Biologically we are animals, and we can be influenced by "carrot/stick" methods. Believing we are watched at all times by an all-powerful god with unlimited powers to reward and punish is an incentive. But are there other ways of producing elevated moral behaviors?

Alfie Kohn thinks so and has written a book called *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes.* Here and in his lectures he urges teachers and other authorities to go beyond low-level, animal-training techniques. Doing good can be its own reward. "Bribes" are unnecessary and often counter-productive. Linking desired behavior with them tends to undermine self-satisfactions. Religious people also generally see their relationship with God as something more basic than after-death pleasure/pain calculations.

END NOTES

In sum, values themselves are more important than their origins. Are we members of democratic organizations? Authoritarian ones? Do we work through groups stressing tolerance? Is our nationalism focused on joy in diversity? Or, are our beliefs rigid? Is hatred of outsiders a focus? How does this hatred affect us and others?

If religious, do we assume that our group is the only one that has received --or is now receiving--moral enlightenment? If we share basic morals, can we work with others who have a very different concept of religion? With doubters or atheists?

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[1] These assumptions are the basis of many if not most prejudice reduction programs.

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Chapter Five: RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Religion involves the belief that there is a universal spirit, god or divine entity that has established an eternal moral order. This moral order can, in part, be known to humans. People have a duty to follow its dictates, and their willingness to do so has long term significance for one's soul or essence. How does science fit in? In what ways are religion and science compatible? When and why is there conflict? These are questions that we will think about in this lesson.

WHAT IS SCIENCE?

Perhaps as much as any other writer, Isaac Asimov is respected for his ability to write about science in a way that non-scientists understand. One of his descriptions of science is as follows:

> Science is a process of thought, a way of looking at the universe. It consists of the gathering of observations which can be confirmed by others using other instruments at other times in other ways. From these confirmed observations, consequences and conclusions can be reasoned out by logical methods generally agreed upon. These consequences and conclusions are tentative and can be argued over by different people in the field and modified or changed altogether if additional, or more subtle, observations are made. There is no belief held in advance of such observations and conclusions except that observations can be made, that consequences and conclusions can be reasoned out, and that the Universe can, at least to a degree, be made comprehensible in this fashion....
>
> Science works through the organization of many observations that may in themselves seem to have no interconnection. Such organization is called a "theory" that demonstrates interconnection, gives meaning to the observations, and, very often, predicts as-yet-unmade observations. Such a theory is [considered] more valid as more and more scientists make observations that fit the theory. However valid such a theory may seem, it is always subject to modification and further generalization....
>
> Science depends upon the decisions of the intellectual marketplace. All its observations, all its conclusions, all its theories are openly published and are studied and argued over. There are controversies and disputes that are sometimes unresolved for long periods of them. There are even (since scientists are human) observations made, sometimes, that are false or

> conclusions that are unjustified. These are sooner or later discovered by other scientists, since it is hard, or even impossible, to maintain for long an impostor in the face of the scientific system of open investigation. (*Voices for Evolution*, Berkeley, CA: The National Center for Science Education, 1995, pages ix-x.)

Note major points that Asimov is making:

Science deals with the natural world. It only can deal with things that--directly or indirectly--can be weighed, measured, counted or objectively studied in some way. Findings must correspond with factual data that can be duplicated by other scientists in other places.

Religion, in contrast, is based upon faith. Ideas--such as reincarnation--cannot be scientifically demonstrated. It is "truth" to believers, but it is not scientific in nature.

Scientific laws, theories and factual understandings are open-ended. All are subject to revision as new data accumulates. All are best understandings at the present time, not eternal, unchangeable truth.

Religious beliefs embody elements of eternal unchangeable truth. As a consequence, faith groups usually focus on, preserve, revere and study ideas of their founders. In contrast, understanding of scientific ideas builds upon what has been discovered in previous generations. The writings of early scientists are studied, but they are not the core of any scientific course. There are no ancient scientific "holy books."

Science is multicultural and androgynous (non-gendered). The established laws of physics used by scholars in the United States are the same as those used in the People's Republic of China, Nigeria or anywhere else. Subatomic particles discovered by women are no different from those discovered by men. All scientists use the natural world as the testing ground for their ideas regardless of personal differences.

Gender, culture, religion, social class and other life situations likely will influence the selection of questions a scientist considers worthy of study. Secular and religious values will determine the kinds of procedures considered ethical and that, therefore, can be used. Science, in other words, is affected by outside cultural pressures as well as those that scientists have internalized. But, the scientific goal is to separate these things as much as possible from the work that is to be done. Striving to be objective enables men and women from many different cultural backgrounds to work together successfully.

Being a scientist requires rigorous study. No one is a scientist when born. No one suddenly becomes one through "conversion" or "seeing the light." In contrast, children are part of religious communities. They become participating members of their parent's faith while still very young. As young or old adults, they may convert to a new or different faith. Although this conversion may be based upon extensive study, it is not a requirement. It can be sudden and emotionally based. Religion is based upon acceptance of ideas that cannot be scientifically demonstrated.

"Thinking scientifically" is difficult for most people. It involves an ability to avoid common fallacies and supernaturalism, using only natural cause/effect relationships along with having a somewhat detached (objective) view of a situation. People who have these abilities often are said to have a lot of "common sense." This kind of thinking, however, is uncommon, usually requiring learning and practice.

Science is a public--not hidden--activity. In principle no scientific field is secretive. Asimov says that "...all [scientific] theories are openly published and are studied and argued over." In contrast, religions often have rituals restricted to believers and perhaps to inner circles of leaders.

In actual practice, this difference is not clear-cut. Many of us have difficulty understanding scientific analysis because of its complexity and our own educational limitations. Also, many governments and business organizations conduct secret scientific research to gain advantage over competitors. Asimov is describing the scientific ideal.

ARE RELIGION AND SCIENCE IN CONFLICT?

We learn from science that humans have evolved from primates on a water-soaked planet circling a minor star located on an outer rim of a typical spiral galaxy. This galaxy, the Milky Way, is one among trillions in the known universe.

How do we respond to this data? How can we make sense of our lives? There is no way we can clearly see any "overall cosmic plan" from a scientific perspective since we are one microscopic segment of the universe. Nonetheless, we try. Using our brains we consciously think about how we should live--and why.

For millions of people now as in the past, religious belief is a key. Even though our earth is a microscopic bit of the universe, some religious people believe a divine entity has provided them with direct knowledge of the physical universe in addition to moral guidelines.

For instance, almost all world religions have creation stories. These can be interpreted as significant because they embody moral truths. They also can be read as one might read a history text. Religion and science likely will clash when a holy book is used as a factual record of such past events.

Consider evolutionary concepts. Natural science make little sense apart from evolutionary theory. It is a key concept in physics, chemistry, astronomy, biology, paleontology and numerous other disciplines. If one rejects evolution on religious grounds, there will be conflict. However, leaders of most established religions accept the evolutionary concepts worked out by scientists. *Voices for Evolution* (used at the beginning of this chapter) is an excellent collection of official statements by religious groups who support evolutionary concepts.

Finally, the idea of humans receiving heavenly messages is central to a religious understanding of life. The methods and means include dreams, meditation, trances, rituals, concentrated thinking and intensive study. Communications also are believed to come through angels, prophets, saint-like people, boddisatvas, intermediary gods, goddesses and a variety of other spiritual entities. As one example, a child may be thought to have one earthly parent and one heavenly one--and, therefore, be a heavenly messenger. People who can do out-of-the-ordinary things are sometimes thought to be "touched by God." Belief in these kinds of universal communication does not accord with current scientific perspectives.

From a scientific perspective, babies do not emerge from lotus flowers to deliver philosophical lectures. They are not born to virgin women. People who actually die do not come back to life. People are not miraculously transported to other worlds or other dimensions (including heavens and hells) and then come back again. There is there no scientific evidence that such regions exist let alone that entities from them have visited earth.

As a consequence, large numbers of scientists and other logically-oriented people are secularists. Not all by any means, however. Scientists are as awed by the wonder of the universe as is anybody else. Being human, they also may seek purposefulness in the universe that's not available through science. They also may fear death and yearn for immortality beyond DNA and cultural influence. So, many are religious in traditional and non-traditional ways.

All of us must have value systems. And, all ethical structures--religious and secular--start with unproven, "taken-for-granted" assumptions. Religious beliefs are not different from secular values in this regard. Think of the democratic ideal of *essential human equality*. It may be attributed to divine authority, or it may not. Regardless, it can't be "proved right" to somebody who rejects the idea.

DOES SCIENCE SUPPORT A GOD-CONCEPT?

Can scientists establish the existence of a divine maker of the universe? The answer is "No!" But, some philosophers, scientists and science writers have tried--from Spinoza who wrote *Ethics* (published after his death in 1677) through Frank Tipler who recently wrote the *Physics of Immortality* in the 1990's. The "Self-evident Truth" fallacy is central in these attempts. Key words are given new meanings very different from traditional usage. Then, the word is used as if the two concepts--united by a single verbalism--are one thing.

> By immortality Spinoza means, not the duration of the personality beyond the grave, but the attainment of a certain high quality of thought and action in the present existence; and the fact that a person's life, when it is over, becomes a part of the unchanging and eternal past. By god he meant, not a supermaterial being possessing the attributes of purpose, justice, consciousness and love, but simply the totality of nature. (Corliss Lamont: *The Philosophy of Humanism*, page 38.)

Tipler does much the same thing. One qualified reviewer says that he "typically assigns the label 'God' to a mathematical construction that...certainly does not correspond in any serious sense to what the word 'God' is normally taken to refer to" (George Ellis. "Piety in the Sky," *Nature*, vol. 371, no. 6493, Sept. 8th, 1994, page 115). Another says that "Mr. Tipler labels the hypothetical final state of a closed universe [Omega Point] and then renames it 'God.'" "If you call a cat's tail a leg, how many legs does a cat have? Five, you say? No, only four. Just calling a tail a leg doesn't make it one. Even cats know that." (Howard J. Van Till. "Books in Brief," *National Review*, Dec. 5th, 1994, page 81).[1]

WILL SCIENCE REPLACE RELIGION?

Beginning in the 1700's many educated people thought so. Leaders of the Enlightenment thought that it was only a matter of time until the transformation was complete. These predictions have not come true nor are they likely to for several reasons.

Science and religion are human responses to different questions. They appeal to different aspects of the human mind.

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[1] To pursue the idea that science can support religion read *Toward A Scientific Theology* by Ralph Burhoe (1981) or *Religion in an Age of Science* by Ian Barbour (1990). For a short, easily read summary of other attempts to establish the existence of God see "Can Science Prove God" by Bernard Leikind. *Skeptic*, vol. 3, No. 4, 1995, pages 57-63.

The first is pleasing to the the rational and analytic aspects of human brains. Science is designed to keep feelings at arm's length, not letting them interfere with the work at hand. In contrast, religion revolves around the emotions. Its rituals stimulate feelings of worth and identity with fellow believers. People such as astronomer Carl Sagan may be comfortable and emotionally fulfilled without the psychological "strength" that religion supplies. Others are not.

Many Western intellectuals follow in the *natural theology* tradition of Thomas Aquinas. He believed there can be no enduring conflict between religion and the natural world since one divine entity is the source of all wisdom. "God as primary cause works through the secondary causes that science studies..." (Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, page 11).

Thomas Aquinas was a Christian, but his view of "natural theology" does not lead to any specific faith. It does not direct one toward Christianity any more than it does toward Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, or one of the newer faith orientations. In pantheistic religion all is god including science. But, pantheism itself does not provide guidelines for day-to-day actions. For these one must look to some specific wisdom tradition.

Even though there is little likelihood that religion will disappear, concepts almost certainly will change in response to ever-new scientific discoveries and world situations as has happened in the past. People will combine elements of the old in novel ways, and new belief systems will continue to emerge.

END NOTES

Think of our lives as a trip on a global speedboat. Science has given us the ability to go very fast, to rapidly change our culture. But, where are we going? Our enduring secular and religious systems of belief provide directional guidelines. They are a compass for where our speedboat ought to be headed.

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Chapter Six: RELIGION AND HUMAN LIFE

BEGINNINGS OF LIFE AND THE SOUL CONCEPT

Humans are a part of the flow of life found on planet earth. The first simple life-forms reproduced by splitting. Where there had been one "creature" now there were two. The original tissue simply parts. Since reproduction took place through division, dying was not the norm. In this sense the first simple creatures on earth are still alive!

The natural death of bodies began with sexual reproduction--when species became gendered. Male and female parts unite producing fertilized seeds or eggs. This life-renewal process involves creating new plants or bodies (babies) and destroying old ones (natural death).

The bodies of all complex, gendered life-forms struggle to remain alive today as in the past. We humans are no exception. In addition, we have the intelligence to foresee our own demise and we strongly object. Many would agree with poet Dylan Thomas:

> Do not go gentle into that good night,
> Old age should burn and rave at the close of day,
> Rage, rage against the dying of the light.[1]

From scientists we learn that aspects of our biological selves continue through DNA transferred to our children. We know that aspects of our social selves continue to exist through culture, especially among those people we directly influence. These kinds of continuance relate to this earth and can be scientifically demonstrated. They provide enough psychological comfort for some humans but not others.

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[1] Bergen Evans. *Dictionary of Quotations.* New York: Delacorte Press, 1968.

Historically, at this psychological point people commonly turn toward religion. Or more commonly, they simply accept as true the religion in which they have been raised. Their faith, they believe, encapsulates what is known of "God's plan" more than any other wisdom source.

Most of the multiple forms of faith that have arisen on earth assume the existence of souls. Is belief in a soul rational? Yes, in that it comes from human attempts to understand the universe and their place in it. And, it apparently had survival value for our species or it would not have become so common. For a secular person, however, the idea of a soul involves multiple logical problems. Consider the following questions:

Did the very first simple life-forms--those that reproduce by splitting--have souls? If not, when did *ensoulation* take place? Did souls come with sexual reproduction? Are plants excluded? Are all animals except humans excluded? If so, when in the evolutionary process did humans become special?

Did souls exist from time immemorial and then pass from body to body? When, during the flow of life, do specific human bodies and souls become attached? Or, does each human have an individual soul? Regardless, when does it attach itself to an emerging human? When an egg is fertilized? Sometime later during pregnancy? At or after birth? In some societies babies are not morally valued until they prove viable (healthy). Where do souls go when a person dies?

HOW DO WE DEFINE "HUMAN LIFE"?

Life is a continuous flow. Tissue does not suddenly come to life at conception anymore than it does when an amoeba divides. The question for both religious and secular people is this: At what point does one start valuing the results of the life-renewing process in humans?

A female human egg eventually becomes a person if fertilized and cared for properly. But, do female eggs themselves have human rights? Is a woman who menstruates morally defective? Should we encourage child brides? --Criminally charge a woman who has a second menstrual period without attempting pregnancy?[2] At the other extreme, who among us is willing to argue that no human life is worthwhile in and of itself? Secular humanists certainly don't believe this.[3] If we are not willing to take either of these extreme stands, we must believe that at some point validation--a religious person would say *sanctification*--does take place. But when does an emerging human life become inherently valuable?

Democratic people--religious and secular--agree that children have civil rights from birth. And, few in the modern world claim that unfertilized eggs have intrinsic rights. Questions revolve around when--during pregnancy--the rights of the mother-to-be should give way to rights of the child-to-be? For how long and under what circumstances should a pregnant woman be allowed to have an abortion, if at all?

In secular democracies, a common view is to consider when the fetus can live outside the mother's womb.[4] Using such guidelines, some people willing to end early pregnancies may have moral difficulties with late-term abortions. A religious person may think of when, during the process, she or he believes ensoulation takes place. In one tradition this may be at the time of conception. In others new-born babies are not morally valued until they prove viable (healthy).

ENDING HUMAN LIFE

One can view the human body as an integrated, self-sustaining "system" consisting of billions of individual parts, or cells. The body-system continues even as its component cells die on a continuing basis and are replaced. Human bodies as units also are genetically programmed to end. At some point all cells die more-or-less together. This natural death can be delayed a bit through healthful living and medical means, but the end is inevitable. How should we view this earthly termination whether or not one accepts the idea of a soul?

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[2] In prescientific times peoples often believed that male sperm included microscopic human babies and women basically were incubators, similar to a kangaroo's pouch. Given this understanding, male sperm was viewed as sacred and masturbation was an "evil" act.

[3] For example, see *The Philosophy of Humanism* by Corliss Lamont, (Eighth Ed., 1997. pages 13-15. Originally published in 1949.

[4] This point is now much earlier than it was a generation ago because of scientific advance.

Is it best to end life while healthy; avoiding decay stages? Should a pregnant woman be expected to give up her life to save her fetus? Should people, mostly young men, sacrifice themselves in warfare to save their society and/or religion? Should murderers be put to death? Should we keep physical bodies alive when the brain has ceased to function effectively (permanent comas or severe Alzheimer's, for instance)? Is one justified in killing people who actively work against our concept of divine power? How should one respond to approaching death? "Rage" against it as Dylan Thomas recommended?

There is much disagreement, but generally it is not a religious vs. secular one.

There are religious and secular pacifists. There are "warmongers" who believe in god and those who don't. In both camps there are those who support abortion and those who oppose it. In any large group there likely will be people who believe that *means used determine ends,* and who abide by the The Golden Rule. In that same group there may be others convinced that *ends justify means.* Believing their objectives to be "glorious," they feel morally justified doing "whatever is necessary." Even warfare and human destruction may be considered okay.

This does not mean that religions have no general "means/ends" differences. As mentioned in Chapter One, Western dualistic faiths tend to be more war-like than Eastern pantheistic ones.[5] Westerners are more likely to have an "ends justifies the means" frame of mind. Nonetheless, one has no trouble finding Jewish, Christian and Islamic leaders and organizations dedicated to peaceful conflict resolution.

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[5] Jains are especially devoted to the idea of non-violence. Exceptionally religious Jains extend the concept to include all animal life including that which is almost microscopic.

RELIGION AND HUMAN SEXUAL EXPRESSION

In many societies human sexual intercourse has been (and is now) incorporated into religious rituals. It is viewed as a "divine way" of renewing life and, therefore, an appropriate mode of religious expression. At the other end of the spectrum are individuals and religious groups who consider sex to be evil or harmful. Sex sometimes is avoided because it interferes with a focus on religion.[6] Or, it is viewed solely in reproductive terms so that anything that removes sex from conception and birth--masturbation, contraception, abortion, homosexual acts, etc.--is wrong.

Homosexuality can be compared to left-handedness. Both are minority condition found in all cultures.

Should people be required to write using only their dexterous (right) hand? Is using their sinister (left) hand evil?[7] It was in many places and times. Parents and teachers spent long hours training their naturally left-handed children to be "right-handed." They still do in parts of the world.

Historically, homosexuals have had much harder lives than left-handed people. Sometimes their sexuality has been ignored or even praised. More often, however, they have been condemned.[8]

END NOTES

Consider the situation of homosexuals and other minority individuals. If religious, should one ask why God made them? To test their faith more severely than others in the society? To test the tolerance of others?

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[6] The Shakers are one group that forbade sex and continued to exist for a time through adopting babies and attracting outsiders. Most recently, the Heaven's Gate people tried to be sexless.

[7] Natural left-handed people generally can be taught to do most ordinary daily things with their right hand. However, this does not change their natural inclination because we are dealing with an overall brain orientation. For instance, eyes and feet also function differently.

[8] Consult John Boswell's book *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* for a summary of Christian beliefs over the Centuries (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

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Chapter Seven: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

HUMANITY AND RELIGION

At some point in our evolutionary past humans and other ape species had common ancestors with small brains, and actions guided mostly by instinct. Our primate species separated from others as upright walking developed. Then, vocal cords became versatile and brain capacity expanded. Detailed learning from generation to generation became possible. Instincts didn't disappear, but they did become overladen and "channeled" by learning.

This distinction between biology (instinct) and emerging human culture would not have been evident to individuals of any one generation. "Tradition exerts its influence tacitly--spontaneously and unthinkingly. No laws are formulated or penalties affixed; no plans for moral education are intentionally devised. Group expectations are so strong that the young internalize them automatically" (Huston Smith, page 104).

Occultism and religion became integral parts of the emerging human cultures every place in the world. From a religious perspective this development shows the "hand of God" influencing human history.

Non-religious individuals rely on other explanations. From a secular perspective spiritism became universal because it provided an evolutionary advantage. It justified, preserved and supported group traditions and leadership structures. It seemed to explain natural occurrences--such as rain and wind storms, and gave people the feeling of controlling these (through the rituals performed). It provided our ancestors with explanations for why they existed and why they should work for the common good, controlling selfish impulses. Moreover, elaborate ceremonies directed pent-up emotions into group activities that psychologically united people (enhanced in-group identities).

In these pre-literate societies, no division between religion and secular life existed. The spirit world was as real as the animals and plants that were food sources.

Helpful spirits hovered to give advice through "signs," omens, and dreams as did the ghosts of dead ancestors. Natural occurrences such as lightning were associated with particular gods as were surrounding objects. Geographic features important in peoples' lives--rivers, mountains and the like--were holy places and/or the abodes of gods. Demons (harmful spirits) were an ever-present danger. Almost universally it was believed they harmed careless people, even taking over their bodies and perhaps turning them into witches, zombies and the like. Shamans (witch doctors), therefore, were in high demand within most groups.

Shamans and other leaders helped organize elaborate rituals thought pleasing to gods and spirits. These often included animal sacrifice and not infrequently human sacrifice. Trances--some drug induced--were used for divine communication.

Details differed, but this general outline of belief probably was true for all Old Stone Age people.

As human populations increased, bands and tribes had to modify their age-old methods of hunting and food-gathering economies to survive. By 8,000 BCE (ten thousand years ago) agriculture was beginning in what we now know as New Guinea, the Middle East and the Americas. As agriculture developed so did the spirit world associated with it. Fertility rituals and worship of goddesses increased in importance. Villages developed and, in some areas, grew into towns. Eventually--about 5,000 years ago--cultures with cities first emerged.

The first cities were in the Middle East, and Egypt in north Africa. Urban centers of roughly 10,000 people had specialized workers and complex social hierarchies. Writing was invented to keep accurate commercial records. (Who sold how much of what to whom for what price?) Once in existence, however, people found that they could use writing for many purposes. Mostly they wrote about their spirit worlds, and many of these records survive. They describe anthropomorphic (human-like) gods and people intermingling.

As these city-based societies (civilizations) grew and others developed, people with differing beliefs came into contact. Out of trading and war, religions developed that went beyond tribal spirit systems. That is, beginning about 2,500 years ago (500 BCE) world religions begin to emerge. These evolved into the Eastern and Western faith traditions studied in Chapter One.

Many other faiths have come into existence over the centuries, and some of these have prospered. Jainism--that began in South Asia at about the same time as Buddhism--has several million followers. Zoroastrianism developed in Iran and was a source from which Israelites borrowed ideas. Sikhism with its headquarters in the Indian Punjab State came from Islamic/Hindu foundations. The Bahai faith (originating in Iran in the 1800's CE) incorporates insights from various major faiths.

A number of new faiths also emerged in the United States in the 1800's. The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and Christian Science are two of several that have survived. And as discussed in Chapter Two, we currently are living in another era of very active religious experimentation and development.

HUMANITY AND SECULARISM

Backtracking historically, secularism began in China and near the Mediterranean Sea about the same time that world religions were forming.

In China Confucius and men such as Kung-sun Lung viewed the development of logic as a main human task. Brilliant intellectual work continued in China for more than 1,500 years during the Chin, Tang, Sung and other dynasties. A Civil Service testing system based on Confucian thought was used. Century after century Chinese scholars recorded the history of the realm, accumulating medical and mechanical wisdom as well as secular literary works. Copies of hundreds of these ancient manuscripts exist today.

Science and democracy in cities originally were Western innovations. Aristotle, who died in 322 BCE, used kinds of scientific observation. However, his experimental methods were not continued. Basic scientific research as understood today is the product of the last 500 years. It grew out of the European Renaissance when people refocused upon methods used by Aristotle and knowledge from India that had been preserved and expanded by Islamic scholars during the European Dark Ages.

Galileo, Bacon and Newton all lived during the 1600's when physics evolved. In the 1700's chemistry began as trained individuals freed themselves from the magic and occultist beliefs associated with alchemy. Geology and biology achieved scientific status in the early 1800's. Nuclear science came in the early 1900's.

The social sciences are very young. Auguste Comte used the word *sociology* in an 1838 publication. However, he and other early sociologists basically were humanistic scholars like Confucius. They started with certain philosophic values, drew logical implications from these (deductive reasoning), and then told others what they should be doing. They wrote about applying the scientific method of inquiry to human group behavior, but they didn't do it.

Generalizations about human life based upon systematic scientific study did not begin until the very late 1800's. In 1897 sociologist Emile Durkheim published an analysis of suicide based upon a scientific research design. He used an organized plan to collect facts and figures on people who had killed themselves. He then used this data as the basis for his conclusions. At about the same time other social sciences such as anthropology--the study of human cultures wherever found--and psychology were coming into existence.

Until 1900 CE scientific study was mostly a personal effort, or it might involve the informal cooperation of a small group of colleagues. Experiments and field studies often could not cost more than the individuals involved were willing or able to spend. The stage was being set, however. In the late 1800's European scientists--especially those in Germany who were working for universities--would patent their discoveries, and then sell their patent rights to companies.

After 1900 large corporations in such areas as electricity and electrical products began setting up scientific research laboratories. Siemens in Germany and General Electric in the United States were two of the first. These were soon followed by labs developed by communication industries such as Bell Telephone. Although small at first, "pure" scientists--many trained in Europe--were hired to develop theories and conduct research that could lead to useful company products.

Huge multi-million dollar laboratories employing hundreds of people working in a coordinated fashion have existed since the mid 20th Century. For instance, two large governmental labs--Argonne National Laboratory and the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory are in the Chicago area. Argonne began with experiments on nuclear energy during World War II. Fermilab started in 1968.

Scientific specialties come into existence in somewhat the same manner as do new religions. That is, they usually grow out of an existing science, or scientists in separate disciplines joining to develop a new way of viewing their research matter.

END NOTES

Lifeways became different one from another as humans acquired culture, separated and populated the world. The human mind evolved so remarkably that no group possibly could focus equally on all aspects of their members' potential.

In China social order based upon hierarchy (Confucianism) was emphasized along side of harmony with nature (Taoism). South Asians concentrated on the connectedness of all things emphasizing psychological introspection. Groups around the Mediterranean viewed people as distinct beings with separate souls. This individualism produced dualistic religion as well as secular democracy and science.[1]

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[1] "The values of science and the values of democracy are concordant [harmonious], in many cases indistinguishable. Science and democracy began--in their civilized [settings]--in the same time and place, Greece in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. Science confers power on anyone who takes the trouble to learn it... Both science and democracy encourage unconventional opinions and vigorous debate." (Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World,* page 38.)

In Islam, Allah's almightiness and the created Cosmic gloriousness have been centering points. Using this foundation, a thousand years ago Muslim scholars integrated the learning of India, Greece, Rome and expanded upon it producing the Islamic Golden Age. It spread from China to Spain and lasted for about 500 years, from 700 CE to 1200 CE.

Today the world's cultural systems are no longer separate. They are ethnic neighborhoods in one global community. Can we learn to use our differences constructively as people in many multicultural neighborhoods already do? Can we work together in peaceful and mutually profitable ways? The last lesson, "Getting Together" is designed to stimulate thought on this question.

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Chapter Eight: GETTING TOGETHER

BASIC QUESTIONS

This lesson is designed to stimulate thinking about our loyalties as they relate to religious and/or secular life views. Specifically, how should we view people whose belief systems differ from ours? If religious, how do we look upon those adhering to other faiths? Those having no religion? If secular, do we judge people by their religious identifications? Should we try to convert them to our own ways of thinking? If so, under what circumstances? What methods are okay to use? Not okay?

How far should tolerance extend? Do we accept dogmatic faiths (religious and secular) whose believers say they would destroy all opposition if the opportunity presented itself? Should we do nothing in the face of practices we view as abhorrent? What if a group is extremely deceptive in its methods of recruitment? Should we avert our eyes when one ethnic group tries to destroy another (genocide)? In the name of multiculturalism, tolerance or some other ideology should we say nothing when women on far parts of the globe are degraded? When children here or elsewhere are denied standard secular medical treatment?

Will I preach tolerance only when my group is weak? Become intolerant as our power increases? Are the so-called holy wars in world history recurrent monuments to such thinking? If secular, should I view religion in general as a problem? Do particular faiths need to be controlled? If so, which ones? Why? What are acceptable reasons for regulating religious practices? At what stage does this road lead to religious bigotry? How important is another's god-view if we share worldly goals?

Do I understand that a multi-religious, democratic society can promote personal understanding? Interacting with people with alternative world views may stimulate one to think more closely about personal beliefs and, perhaps, see them in a new light?

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Humans are biologically and psychologically capable of identifying with all of humanity. However, old local loyalties do not easily become more inclusive. Rapid social change often causes us to identify with the past. We try to reestablish an order we perceive existed in earlier, happier times.

Currently we are experiencing extremely rapid social change. Not surprisingly, therefore, there is an upsurge of looking-to-the-past in many world cultural regions. Perhaps the demand that schools teach religion is one example.

This "return to the golden age" thinking is unlikely to be realistic. Regardless of desires, large scale historical processes probably cannot be stopped.[1]

> The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
> Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
> Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
> Nor all thy tears wipe out a Word of it.[2]

From a Western perspective at least, earthly time is more like an arrow shot from a bow than traveling in a circle.

We are not helpless when facing the future, however. If religious, we likely will seek divine inspiration. If secular, we understand that the future is not predetermined. It is what we as members of the dominant species, working together, can make it.

---

[1] Individuals, small groups and sometimes whole societies are able to isolate themselves for a time, Think of the Korean "Hermit Period," for example or Tokagawa Japanese times (1600-1868 CE). Consider the Amish today.

[2] The "From *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam Rendered into English quatrains by Edward Fitzgerald* (Roslyn, NY: Walter J. Black, Inc., 1942, page 13). Omar Khayyam was a Persian Poet.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

In Chapter One we studied Eastern and Western world religious traditions, both claiming universality. In Chapter Two we commented on new religions. Chapter Three was on guidelines to help in our search for enduring wisdom. Chapter Four related to religion and morality. Chapter Five dealt with religion and science, and Chapter Six focused on religion and human life. In Chapter Seven we reviewed religious development from a historical perspective. Now we are looking to the future as it relates to this planet. How best can we achieve livable societies on earth?

What if a group really believes that its leaders possess *All Truth,* and they start acting on these beliefs? Should individuals be institutionalized? Given tranquilizing drugs? Should the organization be forcefully disbanded? At what point does it become a danger? Do we consider that ***we could be wrong*** ?

Religious people (other than true believers) understand that they cannot fully know the "mind of God." Although any sincere group probably believes it has a fuller revelation than others, outsiders need not be seen as totally removed from divine enlightenment. Educated secularists (other than true believers) acknowledge limitations in all science. They know the quirky human mind battles itself. They acknowledge that many humanistic values grew out of enduring religious traditions.

During the 20th century--as in previous ones--there have been individuals and groups able to see all people on this earth as an in-group. Think of Mohandas Gandhi, a Hindu. Think of the Dali Lama, a Buddhist, or Mother Teresa, a Christian. Think of the Islamic and Jewish leaders who are working for peace in the Middle East. Consider the delegates from around the world who developed the International Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It begins with the following Preamble:

> *Whereas* recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

> *Whereas* disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest inspiration of the common people,
>
> Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,
>
> *Whereas* the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in greater freedom,
>
> *Whereas* Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,
>
> *Whereas* a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,
>
> *Now, therefore, the General Assembly*
>
> *Proclaims* this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the people of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

Humanity's great religions and secular philosophies are monuments to attempts to go beyond self-centered animal behavior. The human emotion of love as something more than a sexual urge is one example.

> "Love, after all, makes us want to further the happiness of others; it makes us give up a little so that others (the loved ones) may have a lot." And if the growth of harmony and the decline of conflict are survival requirements for complex human societies (as they surely must be in the nuclear age), then altruism may turn out to be not just a religious ideal but an evolutionary advantage....

> There is reason to hope for a cooperative intellectual venture between religion and science that may lead to a revival of serious moral thinking.... (Delbanco, *Death of Satan*, pp. 227-28)

We should not mislead ourselves. Harmony and love are ideals toward which we can strive if we care to do so. They are value assumptions we make when we begin our thinking. They can never be fully realized any more than scientists can ever be completely objective. It is the striving that gives life meaning and zest. If religious, we believe there are other-worldly rewards as well.

END NOTES

Earthly problems seem to relate to the destruction of humans and their earthly environment. What, then, should we do? Huston Smith has these recommendations for religious people:

> If one [religion] claims us, we begin by listening to it. Not uncritically, for new occasions teach new duties; but nevertheless expectantly, realizing that it houses more truth than a single lifetime could fathom, let along enact. But in addition to our own traditions, we listen to the faith of others, including the secularists (page 249).

Will beliefs be modified in the process? Likely yes, but unless we already consider ourselves in the possession of all wisdom, modification can be desirable.

Secular people probably will not be impressed by Eastern or Western "god-talk." But, they can still value the life-transforming capability of religion that may have a positive impact on their own lives. Moreover, they can appreciate the music, literature, dance, sculpture, painting and other artistic achievements that have grown out of religious fervor.

Enlarging the scope of our thinking is a primary goal of education.

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Thinking About Religion

Analysis Materials

*Case Studies
*Single Page Analysis
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Case Studies

*New Age Religion

*Religion and Exercising Influence

*Beginning and Change in Religion

Case Study I: New Age Religion

To understand New Age Religion, one begins with pantheistic world view and reincarnation, Eastern religious concepts. Michael Brown in his 1997 book *The Channeling Zone* says that for New Age Religion "The first and most important theological [claim] is that human beings are in essence gods....[H]umans share in the divinity that created the universe." The belief is that people's essence is immortal and inherently good, although that does not mean that people are fully god. It is believed that humans must "undergo successive *reincarnations* to acquire important learning experiences, an evolutionary process that may include lifetimes in other planetary systems or dimensions." (Brown, page 47) In contrast to Hindus and Buddhists who try to end the *painful* cycle of rebirths, New Agers look upon reincarnation as a kind of personal eternal life.

They believe problems (karma) from previous lives as well as this one can be eliminated with the aid of competent "spirit guides," and/or "spiritually charged artifacts" such as crystals. With such aids, an individual is personally responsible for securing her or his own "salvation." Every person can secure crystals or other artifacts and become a channeler. Workshops for securing personal spirit guides are available.

In this system, social change--moving toward universal harmony--can be achieved through focused human thinking. "Thoughts shape reality, and the impact of any thought is magnified when a critical mass of like-minded people share it." Therefore, New Agers come together physically in large crowds to meditate. They also use the Internet that, they believe, makes world-wide united thinking possible. (Brown, pages 47-48) .

Like most other religious people, New Agers don't battle science unless it casts doubts on their beliefs. Religion and science complement each other in a New Agers' view.

Using science, one may learn much by "taking things apart" to determine, in a material way, how they work. But, this scientific reductionist (taking apart) way of knowing, New Agers believe, is destructive by itself. Things aren't just isolated parts. Through holistic religion one puts them back together again.

This general view is shared by most religious people. New Agers, however, give it a special interpretation. They commonly compare the universe to a hologram, for instance. Each part partakes of the essence of the whole. Or, the human brain is said to be like the cosmos. A typical explanation may go something like this: People think using brain cells. These cells are "little universes" of atoms consisting mostly of empty space. We reason across these expanses of "nothingness" that, in a relative sense, are greater than distances between stars and galaxies. Thus, New Agers claim, it's reasonable to believe there is a universal mind thinking through stars and galaxies.

New Agers do not consider any one person's knowledge to be complete. Individuals--all having a divine spark--still have different ways of perceiving. As one consequence, practitioners are very hesitant to criticize. It is, for instance, up to each client to interpret a channeled entity in a helpful way. Failure is not the responsibility the channeler or the entity being contacted. The paying customer must provide useful interpretations, or find another authority who is more helpful.

In the Nineteenth Century many people in England, the United States and elsewhere were interested in Spiritualism. Mediums, it was believed, could contact ghosts of their clients' deceased relatives. These conjured spirits, then, provided assurance of life after death. New Agers may do this, but they often don't consider such earth-bound spirits to be particularly helpful. The spirit guides that play a large role in New Age religion are thought to come from "higher realms," "deep inner space" or "different dimensions." At this point UFO's become relevant. They can be from the same "superior worlds" as channeled entities.

New Age leaders do not think alike any more than do members of other traditions. For instance, some interpret channeling very literally. An entity from another realm is believed to actually take over a channeler's body. Other New Agers see voice and posture change as ways to secure an accepting mind-frame. It's a ritual with somewhat the same significance as Muslims turning toward Mecca to pray or Christians kneeling. Another illustration: Crystals may be viewed as having magical powers--like some Hindus view water from the Ganges River or some Catholics view the spring water at Lourdes. Other New Agers see this as occultism.

New Age Beliefs: Questions for Consideration

1. Neville Row, a practitioner profiled in *The New Believers*, says that even holocaust victims were partly responsible for their fate. He believes they were torturers in previous lives and became victims to rid themselves of this karma. Although not usually carried to this extreme, the kind of thinking is common. Is this a "blame the victim" method of analysis? To what degree, if any, is it helpful in problem-solving?

2. Is meditation through large gatherings or through the Internet a good way to secure social change if there is no follow-up action? (In traditional faiths one seeks spiritual guidance, as a basis for action. In New Age thinking, spiritual guidance often is a substitute for action.

3. If everything is divine in some way, what causes people to perform monstrous acts?

4. How do beliefs compare with with scientific understanding?

5. According to traditional holy books, how do people receive divine wisdom? Consider dreams, prophets, angels and other divine messengers. How do New Age methods compare?

6. What is an appropriate demeanor when observing New Age rituals? Should a sincere channeler, for instance, be accorded the same respect as a "saintly" person from a traditional faith? Should one show the same respect as when observing a Native American spiritual ceremony?

7. Do New Agers differ from traditional occultists? In what ways, if any? What are the benefits and dangers of their beliefs compared to others?

Taken from Michael F. Brown. *The Channeling Zone: American Spirituality in an Anxious Age* (1997. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) and *The New Believers: inside the '"new age" movement* (A 1990 videotape produced and directed by Tom Corboy and funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Calif. Arts Council. Monticello Productions, 1010 Tigertail Rd., Los Angeles CA 90049.)

Case Study II Religion and Exercising Influence

In the past, exercising religious influence often has been a brutal affair. Dominant groups made life miserable for dissenters. Forceful conversion is not the topic of this case study, however. Here we are going to outline some commonly used propaganda techniques so that we can ask ourselves:

1. Which of these techniques do my groups use?
2. Which techniques should they be using?

You may want to focus on your faith organization if you are religious. Or, you can concentrate on a secular aspect of the society.

EXERCISING INFLUENCE: INTELLECTUAL PERSUASION

Rational thinking is a human trait. No animal can think or act logically as can humans. This unique human thinking ability can be used for exercising influence.

When using intellectual persuasion one avoids all things that tend to interfere with thought. One does not offer physical awards or use force, coercion or threats. One avoids emotionalism and psychological trickery. Instead, one stays calm, models desired behavior, is open about one's own motivations and seeks accommodation. That is, one tries to show that the desired course of action will promote the person's own goals.

Intellectual means of persuasion have been worked out in great detail by scholars associated with peace movements and conflict resolution. As one easily secured example of this general procedure read *The Eight Essential Steps to Conflict Resolution* by Dudley Weeks (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1992).

Intellectual persuasion is used by religious persuaders as well as secular ones, and often is successful. Nevertheless, the method has limitations. Logical reasoning requires time, training and practice, any one of which may be lacking. Secondly, there are those who don't understand or respect intellectual methods of persuasion. As a consequence, most groups also propagandize.

USING PROPAGANDA

When using propaganda one shuns force and physical coercion as in intellectual persuasion. In other ways propaganda is very different from intellectual persuasion. When *propagandizing one tries to keep targets from thinking logically.*

To minimize thought one may try to arouse people's emotions. One may physically associate with emotional-laden symbols and sounds. Consider the symbols religious groups use as well as how people speak and sing. When emotional, people can't think clearly and are more open to suggestion than at other times.

One emphasizes hierarchy and authority. Don't think, just follow!

One establishes an in-group identification. Desired actions are associated with group beliefs, and demands are made for loyalty. (Who are you to question? Are you a traitor? An anti-god?)

Control mental in-put. Repeat the basic message endlessly and, if possible, keep subjects from hearing contrary ideas. Most people will believe what they hear repeatedly, especially if the message comes from respected authority figures and no contrary understandings are permitted.

Assume that the goals to be achieved justify various kinds of psychological trickery. Using faulty, child-like kinds of reasoning (fallacies) is one prime example.

At one time the term *propaganda* was a "glory word." It related to the work of missionaries who "propagated" or spread their faith. The word acquired negative overtones when it became associated with governmental efforts to influence public opinion during World War I. (See *Public Opinion* by Walter Lippman. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1922, pages 41.42.) These negative connotations increased when, in the 1930's the word became linked to Hitler's emotionalism, lies and psychological trickery in spreading Nazism. In the 1940's it was associated with Communism and the practices of Stalin in the Soviet Union. Since that time *propaganda* has most often been associated with the methods used to sell commercial products, get political candidates elected, and so forth.

All people use propaganda from time to time. It is used by parents, teachers and political leaders in addition to religious authorities. The methods work particularly well on young people, uneducated individuals and those who are highly prejudiced. They work well in emergency situations when fast action is required. They also are associated with successful united action since group unity has a large emotional component. In this sense it is "logical" for group leaders to emphasize their authority and in-group identity, and try to get people emotionally aroused (which limits their ability to think).

In what situations do you think think religious leaders are justified in using propaganda? What kinds in what situations? What kinds of propaganda?

Religion and Exercising Influence: Questions for Consideration

1. Are the conversion methods used by the missionaries of new religions basically different from those used by established religious leaders? If so, how? Why?

2. Select a religious or secular group with which the members of your group identify. Consider your school, for instance. What methods are used to secure support? How successful are these? What new ethical and effective techniques should they be using?

3. People often have inconsistent standard of ethics. They justify methods used by their faith and condemn very similar methods used by others, especially leaders of new religions. What situations of this sort come to your mind?

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The ideas in the case study come from many sources used over the years at Riverside-Brookfield High School when teaching the unit "Thinking About Exercising Influence." Materials and and extensive bibliography are available through The Teachers' Press.

Beginning and Change in Religion: Comparing Buddhism and Scientology

INTRODUCTION

Westerners tend to compartmentalize, put things into distinct mental compartments, or categories. We especially are inclined to set up two opposing "boxes" as the authors have done when contrasting religious and secular philosophies and again when making distinctions between Eastern and Western religions.

Such distinctions can be necessary for understanding. They are, however, in our minds. In the outside natural world things tend to flow into one another, *gradually* changing their forms. Moreover, people categorize in different ways. One's own mental divisions are not necessarily more real than those of people using very different pigeonholes.

With this understanding, let's ask our fundamental questions once again: What is religion? Who is religious? Answers will depend upon how we define this English verbal symbol.

Everybody may be considered "religious" if we begin with a functional definition. That is, *religion* can refer to whatever is most important in a person's life. Used in this way, I might say that "Professional basketball is my religion, and Michael Jordan is my god."

In this material we are using a substantive definition, however. We have separated religious beliefs and actions from secular ones. In this way of thinking only some people and groups are religiously inclined. Others may be somewhat religious, or almost completely secular.

Reviewing our definition, to be religious a person must believe there is a god-established moral order that can be known at least to some degree. One has a duty to live in accord with this divine morality, and the ability and desire to do so has long-term consequences.

Using these distinctions, how do religions begin? Once started, do they remain the same or change? To gain perspective we will examine Buddhism and Scientology.

SIDDHARTHA GAUTAMA AND BUDDHISM.

Buddhism is a very old religion. About 500 BCE Siddhartha Gautama--later known as Buddha, or the enlightened one--was born into a royal family in a state now a part of India near Nepal. Apparently he found that great wealth and palace life did not lead to happiness, and tried to find contentment through religion. According to ancient accounts, he spent years punishing his body following the instructions of various holy men. Eventually he came to the conclusion that extreme self-punishment didn't work, that new methods were needed.

Gautama decided that each person must achieve her or his own salvation. Gautama came to the conclusion that human life is rooted in suffering and suffering is caused by desires. The way to reduce the first is to reduce the second. One eliminates desire, in turn, by realizing that life is illusion, not real.

He taught that the human body is unreal because it is a compound or conglomerate--not a unitary thing. If living today, he might explain by starting with sub-atomic particles. These make up atoms that form molecules. Molecules, in turn, combine into cells that form tissues that become organs, etc. Pain and suffering end when we comprehend that we are just a level or organization, not something that is "real." Tranquility comes from emotionally divorcing ourselves from attachment to what we perceive to be ourselves.

The Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path of Buddhism are means toward this goal of withdrawing as much as possible from the world. However, each person is individually responsible for becoming free from the desires that cause suffering. If one way doesn't work, a person should try another.

In this system, there is no belief in a divine being or an enduring individual soul. There is no speculation about the reasons for the universe.

Using our definition, this Buddhism is not a religion. In fact, Gautama rejected the Indian religions of his time,[1] developing what we might call a secular self-help system.

Nonetheless, followers quickly moved in the direction of using his teachings to found a new religion. "...upon his death in his eighties, the Buddha's ashes were distributed to various stupas or burial shrines. Buddhist devotees made pilgrimages to these shrines. It was then but a short step to deifying [making a god of] the object of these pilgrimages" (McAfee, *A History of the World's Great Religions*, page 103).

Buddhism as practiced in many parts of the world today clearly is a religion. The largest subdivision is Mahayana Buddhism centered in China (especially in Tibet), Mongolia and Japan.

In these areas Siddhartha Gautama is not considered especially important as a historical individual. Instead, worshipers consider Buddha to be a God-like, eternal essence. People gain release from the cycle of reincarnation with the aid of bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are spirits of holy people who, during their earthly lives, accumulated huge stores of merit. Then, they delayed their own entry into Nirvana (a glorious nothingness following reincarnations) so that their merit could be used to aid others in their spiritual journeys.

Mahayana Buddhists in Tibet and elsewhere also believe that numerous spiritual dimensions between earthly life and Nirvana exist. These range from heaven-like places to hells similar to hell as described in the *Koran*. (McAfee, *A History of the World's Great Religions*, page 116-17).

Buddhism as practiced today is extremely diverse. Over the centuries hundreds of different methods of achieving enlightenment have been developed. The Hinayana form of Buddhism found in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia is more like Gautama's original concepts, but it too is a religion.

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[1] These included Vedic ceremonies based upon horse sacrifice ceremonies accompanied by ritual drunkenness. They also included the Vedic reform movements of Upanishadic Hinduism and Jainism.

L. RON HUBBARD AND SCIENTOLOGY

Lafayette Ronald Hubbard was born in Tilden, Oklahoma in March, 1911 where his mother's sister lived. While very young, his parents moved to Kalispell, Montana and then to Helena. This is where L. Ron Hubbard started school.

During World War One Hubbard's father enlisted in the navy and became a career officer. From this point on, Hubbard's childhood was unsettled. sometimes he lived with his maternal grandparents. He was with them when he dropped out of high school during his junior year, traveling to Guam to be with his parents. While there, he and his parents briefly visited China. During this time he found he had writing skills and enjoyed producing adventure stories.

In 1930 he was admitted to George Washington University's School of Engineering. But, he was more interested in his literary efforts--western tales, magical fantasies and science fiction. Some of these were good enough to sell to popular magazines of the time that specialized in such material.

Pay, however, was low and he was barely able to make a living. Married now with a child to support, he joined the navy in 1940--as his father had during the previous war. Following World War Two he went back to fiction writing but again found himself in poverty. So, he refocused his writing. He produced a manuscript he said was not fiction. He claimed it described a scientific method for achieving freedom and happiness. The book, *Dianetics*, was first published in 1950.

He began with reincarnation as had Gautama, but from this point on his thinking is different. Unhappiness, Hubbard wrote, is the result of situations becoming confused with unsolved problems from previous lives. Instead of dealing with current difficulties, people become caught up in brain rubbish from past lives. These reincarnation residues he called *engrams*. To be happy, a person must get rid of them. Engrams could be eliminated by going through a therapy program that Hubbard devised. At some point a person could become "clear"--free of engrams.

His methods were forms of psychological questioning used in connection with a simple lie-detecting machine measuring hand perspiration. Called an "E Meter," it was based on the understanding that people tend to perspire when ill-at-ease. Hubbard's practitioners, or auditors, asked subjects intimate questions while watching the E-meter dial.

Through these means *auditors* often could determine people's problem areas. Success followed. During the early 1950's *Dianetics* was a popular book, and Hubbard's system widely used.

Then, questions were asked. Hubbard claimed his system was based on scientific research, but who had conducted this research? Where? When? Under what circumstances? Hubbard himself was not trained as a scientist. There were also organizational problems. Who was to have what authority? How had large sums of money been spent? In the midst of this turmoil Hubbard changed directions, transforming his system into a new religion he called Scientology.

Hubbard now said there have been multiple worlds inhabited by intelligent entities for billions of years. He called these age-old intergalactic human-like "gods" *thetans.* and wrote lengthy accounts of their travels through time and space. He described how they came to earth millions of years ago and their interactions with humans.

Hubbard successfully gained followers in the United States as well as in other nations. But problems arose again. These centered around methods Scientologists used to raise money and secure followers.[2] As a result of a law violation, Hubbard's third wife and assistant was imprisoned for a time. Hubbard himself became a recluse during his last years, isolating himself from family members and most of his followers. He died at his California hideout in January, 1986. David Miscavige, a Scientology leader, explained his death as follows:

> "Thus, at 2000 hours, Friday 24 January 1986, L. Ron Hubbard discarded the body he had used in this lifetime for seventy-four years, ten months and eleven days. The body he had used to

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[2] We mentioned that in the past religious proselytizing often has been an ugly affair. In comparison, new religions are quite mild. They do not have the ability to use brute force. Rather, founders must rely upon other means. Psychological ploys, however, can be very ingenious, manipulative and heavy-handed.

> facilitate his existence in this universe had ceased to be useful and in fact had became an impediment to the work he now must do outside its confines. The being we knew as L. Ron Hubbard still exists....He has simply moved on to his next step. LRH in fact used this lifetime and body we knew to accomplish what no man has ever accomplished - he unlocked the mysteries of life and gave us the tools so we could free ourselves and our fellow men..." (Miller, *Bare-Faced Messiah*, page 275.)

END NOTES

From what we know, through his many years of teaching Siddhartha Gautama remained true to (what we call) secularism. His followers transformed the movement into a religion. Like Gautama, Hubbard developed a worldly system many people found helpful, but then he himself deliberately transformed it into a religion.

Change takes place in all continuing organizations. Movements--secular and religious--are modified if they remain vital in people's lives. After explaining word usage, we noted a few of the vast changes in Buddhism. Most likely Scientologists also gradually will remold their faith as time goes by. Consider the thetan concept for instance. In Hubbard's descriptions, thetans seem like the heroes in his science fiction stories. By 1992, however, thetans were described quite differently in Scientology literature.

> thetan: an immortal spiritual being, the human soul. The term *soul* is not used because it had developed so many other meanings from use in other religions and practices that it doesn't describe precisely what was discovered in Scientology. We use the term *thetan* instead, from the Greek letter *theta*...the traditional symbol for thought or life. One does not *have* a thetan, something one keeps somewhere apart from oneself; one *is* a thetan. The thetan is the person himself, not his body or his name or the physical universe, his mind or anything else. It is that which is aware of being aware; the identity which IS the individual (What is Scientology?. Los Angeles: Bridge Publications, Inc., 1992. Quoted from the "Glossary of Terms," pages 816-817.)

Beginning and Change in Religion: Questions for Consideration

1. Why should one study origins of a secular philosophy? A religion? Who turned Buddhism and Scientology from the first into the second? Why, in your view?

2. Read "Understanding An Origin of Supernatural Stories," (Single Page Topic Analysis No. 11). Note how rapidly accounts of "historical events" can be modified. With this awareness, what authorities would you rely upon if assigned to write a biography of Siddhartha Gautama? Would you interview a Buddhist whom you knew? Might you quote a historian such as A. L. Basham? (See page 256 of *The Wonder that Was India.*) What would you put in the biography if your Buddhist sources differed significantly from non-Buddhist authorities such as Basham? Who would you rely upon if studying the life of L. Ron Hubbard? Not rely upon? Why?

3. Do you have a Buddhist or Scientologist family member? How does their understanding of their faith compare with that given in class? Was either faith misrepresented? If so, write an editorial that can be duplicated for your classmates and then discussed. Avoid fallacies and clearly indicate your sources of information.

5. Consider other religious orientations. To what degree can/should a group's description of its founder--or "creation stories in general"--be taken at face value? Look at Native American beliefs, for instance. In *The Day Before America*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994, page 180) author William MacLeish says. "...despite its rigor, the oral way can be far more flexible than the written. Its followers can and do reinvent themselves, spinning a new past for themselves, as the Sioux did after they moved from their rivers and became champion cavalry of the plains."

6. What should one probably keep in mind when relying on a holy book that was passed down orally from generation to generation before being put into writing?

Part II

Single Page

Topic Analysis

Using Single Page Topic Sheets

Thinking About Religion is designed to encourage students to consider religious beliefs from an empathetic and critical thinking perspective. We believe this approach is appropriate for classrooms--public or otherwise--that have secular students as well as those of various religious traditions.

The series of one-page readings are included for several reasons. We want to expose students to faith orientations more specific than the general viewpoints described in the chapter readings. We also want to provide student analysis material. We hope the readings will be a launching pad for individual and group investigation of their own faiths and others.

1. Does the quote or statement have much to do with the beliefs and practices of *any particular individuals*, past or present? How do we know? Students may want contact their own religious authorities or research specific faith denominations. For instance, to what degree does the page on "Native American Religion" correspond to the beliefs and practices of a specific Aboriginal band or tribe?

2. Are authors logical, or are fallacies apparent? Does one find overgeneralizations? Glittering generalities (nice-sounding words lacking clear meaning)? Truth by definition (words not used as defined in dictionaries)? Have students use *Thinking About Social Issues; A Study of Common Fallacies* or a similar source.

3. Is the reading objective, designed basically to inform? Or is it propagandistic, designed to create warm (or cold) feelings for the group involved?

4. How do beliefs of student families within a tradition described correlate with what is said? For instance, to what extent do pupils with American Indian heritage agree with the first reading? How does their perspective differ?

5. Critique one or more readings. Do you relate to it? Disagree? What deficiencies do you find? Interesting ideas?

1. Native American Religion

Tessie Naranjo, the author, chairs the Advisory Committee for the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. The selection comes from "Thoughts on Two Worldviews," *Mammoth Trumpet*, Vol. 10, No 3, July, 1995, pp. 3 and 20. It originally appeared in *Federal Archeology*.

> Traditional Native Americans believe that everyone and everything exist in an integrated and pervasive system of relationships. One resident of Santa Clara Pueblo put it this way:
>
> "We are part of an organic world in which interrelationships at all levels of life are honored. Our relations to the place we live--the land, water, sky, mountains, rocks, animals, plants--is tangible. Our sense of social relationships leads us to respect all who have gone before and all who will follow, our elders as well as our youth."
>
> Traditional Native Americans see an essential relationship between humans and the objects they create. A pot is not just a pot. In our community, the pots we create are seen as vital, breathing entities that must be respected as all other living things. Respect of all life elements--rocks, trees, clay--is necessary because we understand our inseparable relationship with every part of our world.
>
> This is why we honor our ancestors and the objects they created. This honoring allows us to remember our past and the natural process of transformation--of breathing, living, dying, and becoming one with the natural world. Not even in death are we unrelated....Consider museums. Human remains and cultural items are treated as non-living entities. Unacknowledged are the enduring relationships that traditional Native Americans maintain with their ancestors and their world....we do not share the assumptions underlying what museums do; collection, preservation, documentation, and exhibition."

2. Shona (Zimbabwe) World Views

Zimbabwe is an African nation of about ten million people situated just south of the Zambezi River in southern Africa. About 80% of Zimbabwe's people are Shona. The description of Shona beliefs comes from interpretive materials provided by Spirits in Stone, an art gallery in Sonoma, CA devoted to Shona statuary.[1]

"In Shona society, family bonding is the foundation for the culture. It is the sacred unit, and all laws governing Shona society serve to protect these vulnerable bonds."

Chaminuka is the Shona creator god who sees both the noble and base aspects of humans. Chaminuka, however, passes no judgment on human acts. To illustrate the first characteristic, Shona artists always picture Chaminuka with one eye higher than the other. To illustrate the second, the deity always has an expressionless mouth. For guidance, Shona look to ancestor spirits. There is a *mudzimu*--a powerful spirit of a forebearer--to whom a person turns for help. This spirit from the world of the dead protects a living individual's soul providing peace and welfare.

Each living person also has a spirit that is associated with her or his body but can be separated from it now and in the hereafter. That is, Shona believe that everyone has a non-material essence that can travel outside the body and even go into another person's physical being. At death it becomes a mudzimu that will help the living if called upon.

The past, present and future exist together for the Shona. They do not see existence in the lineal way that is central to much Western thought. As a result, "the main...moral element that underlies Shona culture is *kuzvipeta;* the humbling of oneself. This quiet and soft nature defines the very essence of being 'Shona.' For people of this culture, being civilized means that one takes pains not to offend any human being or spirit form."

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[1] Shona art and the people's motivating life-view are described in a variety of publications. For example, see *World Press Review*, April, 1995 (reprinted from *The Economist*, Dec. 24th, 1994); *ARTnews*, Dec., 1993 or *Newsweek*, Sept. 14th, 1987.

3. Understanding The Tao (Dao)

From Alan Watts book, *Tao: The Watercourse Way,* pages 40-44.

> ...it must be clear from the start that Tao cannot be understood as "God" in the sense of the ruler [or] maker of the universe. The image of the military and political overlord, or of a creator external to nature, has no place in the idea of Tao....
>
> Tao cannot be defined in words and is not an idea or concept.....In a similar way, air and water cannot be cut or clutched, and their flow ceases when they are enclosed....Verbal description and definition may be compared to the latitudinal and longitudinal nets which we visualize upon the earth and the heavens to define and enclose the positions of mountains and lakes, planets and stars. But earth and heaven are not cut by these imaginary strings....the game of Western philosophy and science is to trap the universe in the networks of words and numbers, so that there is always the temptation to confuse the rules, or laws, of grammar and mathematics with the actual operations of nature.... [Human thoughts are a part of nature.] Thoughts grow in brains as grass grows in fields. Although thought is in nature, we must not confuse the game-rules of thought with the patterns of nature [outside of the human brain].
>
> [The universe] grows and operates independently, on its own [and everything within it is interrelated.] The earth, and every tiniest thing upon it, inevitably "goes with" the sun, moon and stars....The principle is that if everything is allowed to go its own way the harmony of the universe will be established, since every process in the world can "do its own thing" only in relation to all others....Individuality is inseparable from community....Because of the mutual interdependence of all beings, they will harmonize if left alone and not forced into conformity with some arbitrary, artificial, and abstract notion of order.

For your thought: If Tao cannot be "defined in words," why did Watts write the book? If Tao is "not an idea or concept" what can we know about it? How? Read the *Tao Te Ching* yourself. It takes less than an hour and "remains to this day the basic text of Taoist thought" (Huston Smith, *The Illustrated World's Religions,* page 124).

4. The Nature of Hindu Gods

Throughout the world and throughout recorded history many people appear to need supernatural allies of one sort or another. In this reading André Van Lysebeth compares Hindu gods with Roman Catholic saints. The reading comes from *Tantra*. (1995. York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc. First published in French in 1992.)

> ...no [Hindu] god is ever equated with the Supreme Being, though each individual divinity personified a limited aspect of it. As idealized men and women promoted to the rank of devas [gods], they nevertheless remain very human indeed and are often jealous, vindictive, petty, resorting to prevarication and downright lying when they have managed to paint themselves into a mythological corner! Their allegorical myths serve to "prove" that humans can reach a state of perfection which Indian art has materialized in marvelous sculptures and bronze statues.
>
> To symbolize their supernatural powers, they are graced with several arms, for example, as well as various accessories. [The object that a god holds in each hand is a clue to some particular aspect of human life with which the god is concerned.] Moreover, behind their sometimes dark, threatening or forbidding appearance, their true nature shines through. In Hindu households they are almost a family member, and worthy of veneration. As heavenly beings they are endowed with supernatural powers and although they live on another plane, each idol can be reached through its own cult. In exchange for this worship they grant favors to their devotees or at any rate do them no harm....
>
> Is there an equivalent in the West? ...saints of the Catholic Church are very similar. Like the devas, saints are idealized humans, they live in heaven and are supposed to be sensitive to the prayers and pilgrimages of earthbound devotees. The various cult forms involved (worshiping their statue, praying to them, offering flowers, burning candles...) are all quite similar....The rural chapels found throughout Europe are not all that different, except architecturally, from the small temples in Indian villages. [Catholic] saints intercede on our behalf with the heavenly powers-that-be or use their own supernatural powers to heal people, for example. Devout Catholics are as close to their saints as Hindus are to their...favorite divinity. Some control atmospheric phenomena, such as rain. Others, such as Saint Aloysius..., for example, are the patron saints of guilds, sailors, and so on and so forth.

5. Love for Humanity: Hinduism

Love is a concept central to many religions. This example of the transforming power of love comes out of Hindu belief. (From the *Chicago Tribune*, March 6th, 1997, Sec. 1, page 18, from the Associated Press.)

> An Indian spiritual leader who founded a religious movement based on selfless love for the poor won the world's richest prize for achievement in any field Wednesday. Pandurang Shastri Athavale, 76, was awarded the $1.2 million Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. He said he would put the money back into the Swadhyaya movement, which sponsors housing and agricultural projects throughout India. It has reached an estimated 20 million people in nearly 100,000 villages without any paid staff workers. "We are trying to develop this selfless love. I don't want anything from any villager, not even a cup of coffee," Athavale said in an interview....
>
> Athavale, born to Brahman [high priestly caste] parents...became a respected teacher of the *Bhagavad Gita*, a sacred text of Hinduism that emphasizes passionate devotion to God. In 1954, trying to apply principles of his faith to practice, he and 19 others began visiting villages around Bombay urging people to recognize the presence of God within themselves and their neighbors. The basic message of Swadhyaya--a Sanskrit word meaning self-study--is that all human beings are divine brothers and sisters in the family of God.
>
> Today, there are some 200,000 swadhyayees--as followers are called--traveling throughout India openly mixing with people of all castes, encouraging both personal piety and social programs to build housing and feed the poor. "This award is to advance the human spirit's quest for love and understanding of God," Athavale said. "I see it as a tribute to the conviction that existence of God is central to life and true religion is the guiding principle of life."
>
> Previous winners of the Templeton Prize include Rev. Billy Graham, Mother Teresa and Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

(How does this project compare with Habitat for Humanity?)

6. Understanding the Concept of Karma

In 1949 Mircea Eliade provided a clear description of the Hindu concept of *karma* that is used to explain evil. This selection is from *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), pages 98-99. Eliade wrote in French, and this English translation is by Willard Trask.

> . . . the Indians quite early elaborated a conception of universal causality, the karma concept, which accounts for the actual events and sufferings of the individual's life and at the same time explains the necessity for transmigrations. In the light of the law of karma, sufferings not only find a meaning but also acquire a positive value. The sufferings of one's present life are not only deserved--since they are in fact the fatal effect of crimes and faults committed in previous lives--they are also welcome, for it is only in this way that it is possible to absorb and liquidate part of the karmic debt that burdens the individual and determines the cycle of his future existences. According to the Indian conception, every man is born with a debt, but with freedom to contract new debts. His existence forms a long series of payments and borrowings, the account of which is not always obvious. A man not totally devoid of intelligence can serenely tolerate the sufferings, griefs and blows that come to him, the injustices of which he is the object, because each of them solves a karmic equation that had remained unsolved in some previous existence. Naturally, Indian speculation very early sought and discovered means through which man can free himself from this endless chain of cause-effect-cause. . . . Karma ensures that everything happening in the world takes place in conformity with the immutable law of cause and effect.

7. Understanding Pantheism

Alan Watts used the following story to explain pantheism to small children. Taken from *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*. New York: Collier Books, 1966, pages 11-13.

The universe is god, and had no beginning. It goes round like a clock, repeating itself.

> ....just as the hour-hand of the [clock] goes up to twelve and down to six, so, too, there is day and night, waking and sleeping, living and dying, summer and winter. You can't have any one of these without the other....There are times when the world is, and times when it isn't....Now you see it; now you don't."
>
> God also likes to play hide-and-seek, but because there is nothing outside God, he has no one but himself to play with. But he gets over this difficulty by pretending that he is not himself....He pretends that he is you and I and all the people in the world, all the animals, all the plants, all the rocks, and all the stars. In this way he has strange and wonderful adventures, some of which are terrible and frightening. But these are just like bad dreams....
>
> Now when God plays hide-and-seek and pretends that he is you and I, he does it so well that it takes him a long time to remember where and how he hid himself. But that's the whole fun of it--just what he wanted to do. He doesn't want to find himself too quickly, for that would spoil the game. That is why it is so difficult for you and me to find out that we are God in disguise, pretending not to be himself. But when the game has gone on long enough, all of us will wake up, stop pretending, and remember that we are all one single Self--the god who is all that there is and who lives for ever and ever.
>
> "Of course, you must remember that God isn't shaped like a person. People have skins and there is always something outside our skins....But God has no skin and no shape because there isn't any outside to him....And though I have been talking about God as 'he' and not 'she,' God isn't a man or a woman.

8. Understanding Reincarnation, West and East

Today various "New Age" religions in the West borrow ideas from the East, and reincarnation is one of these. Usually it is interpreted quite differently than would a traditional Hindu or Buddhist, however.

"...Indians typically see samsara [the transmigration of souls] as a prison, for human existence is filled with pain and suffering" (Ward McAfee. *A History of the World's Great Religions*, 1983. New York: University Press, page 55). One's current life reflects the moral sum of deeds during all previous incarnations. A person must deal with this karma, atone for past misdeeds so there is hope for escape in the future. The Hindu typically understands thousands of lives will be necessary. In Buddhism, release may be achieved with few or no additional births. Neither is trying to continue recognizable personal existences. Neither thinks it's important to determine who they were in the past. Such inquiry would be painful and irrelevant even if possible.

In New Age religion, reincarnation--the transmigration of souls from one body to another--is seen as desirable.

Believers assume that their previous "selves" can be recalled. There are New Age hypnotists and others who persuade followers to find out who they were in various eras. Their sessions often "reveal" that clients have been famous individuals! History becomes an ego-booster, used to acquire personal status. Believing in a great past in other bodies may help some people endure hum-drum daily routines. Whether it is a desirable way of acquiring a sense of self-worth depends upon values.

New Age reincarnation becomes a sort of earthly "heaven"--desirable semi-immortality. This view is very different from the traditional Hindu-Buddhist focus on ending individuality and merging with *The One*--as a raindrop does when it falls into the ocean. The desired goal for the Hindu or Buddhist believer is "glorious nothingness" as opposed to New Age celebrations of individual continuity.

9. Good and Evil: A Western Dualism

All people have approved ways of behaving as well as others that are frowned upon or condemned. This division is a major difficulty for religious people: What is the godly source of "bad" thoughts and actions? Peter Stanford says that in early times Middle Eastern peoples viewed the Divinity as the creator of all worldly events--much as did the people in South Asia. A dualistic view of good and evil came gradually to the Mediterranean Sea area. The following selection is taken from *The Devil: A Biography* by Stanford (1996: New York: Henry Holt and Co., pages 7-10).

> The deities of [ancient] Egypt, and of Canaan and the various peoples of Mesopotamia, were monist--where only one overall divine principle encompassed...both good and bad. A different model of organizing the relationship between good and bad came with Zoroaster....His good god--Ahura Mazda--was in direct conflict with Ahriman, the god of war. This was dualism in its purest form....
>
> Judaism took the monist approach. Yahweh was the almighty, all-powerful one, equally responsible...for good and bad events and actions, even at one stage egging Moses on to rape and pillage. This monism began to be eroded in the Book of Job....There Satan makes his first appearance, still very much under Yahweh's wing, as a kind of chief prosecutor at the heavenly court, but at odds with his master over the human capacity to do or be good for its own sake.
>
> It was in the apocryphal literature [writings not accepted for the authorized Bible] that blossomed between the writing of the final books of the Old Testament and the time of Christ that a sustained challenge was mounted to official monism [and] the figure of Satan, the fallen angel, found a place as Yahweh's rival in a cosmic battle....All that was evil or negative in the world was ascribed to this angel of darkness as a complex and intertwined series of stories about the "Watcher angels" who had accompanied Satan on his fall from grace was developed. They were the source of much of the imagery that surrounds the Devil in the New Testament and later in the mainstream of Christian thought...
>
> Whatever the limits imposed by official teaching, the Devil [as the source of evil] became an essential part of the Christian fabric, someone to blame when trouble and dissent cast a cloud, the eternal and convenient scapegoat.

10. Receiving Divine Communication

How do people believe they receive divine instructions? Karen Armstrong describes Muhammad's experiences through which the *Koran* came into being. From *A History of God,* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993, pages 138-39).

> In Islam Gabriel is often identified with the Holy Spirit of revelation, the means by which God communicates with men. This was no pretty naturalistic angel, but an overwhelming ubiquitous presence from which escape was impossible. Muhammad had had that overpowering apprehension...which the Hebrew prophets had called...holiness, the terrifying otherness of God. They too had felt near to death and at a physical and psychological extremity when they experienced it....
>
> Unlike the Torah, however, which according to the biblical account was revealed to Moses in one session on Mount Sinai, the Koran was revealed to Muhammad bit by bit, line by line and verse by verse over a period of twenty-three years. The revelations continued to be a painful experience....He had to listen to the divine words intently, struggling to make sense of a vision and significance that did not always come to him in a clear, verbal form....In the Koran, God tells Muhammad to listen to the incoherent meaning carefully and...not rush to force words or a particular conceptual significance upon it until the true meaning revealed itself in its own good time....
>
> Like all creativity, it was a difficult process. Muhammad used to enter a tranced state and sometimes seemed to lose consciousness; he used to sweat profusely, even on a cold day, and often felt an interior heaviness like grief that impelled him to lower his head between his knees, a position adopted by some contemporary Jewish mystics when they entered an alternative state of consciousness--though Muhammad could not have known this.

11. Understanding An Origin of Supernatural Stories

Mircea Eliade provides an example from this century illustrating how supernatural stories can arise. This selection comes from *Cosmos and History*, published by Harper & Brothers in 1954, pages 44-46. (*Cosmos and History* is Willard Trask's English translation of *Le Mythe di l'e'ternel retour* (Paris, Librairie Gallimard, 1949).

> ...the recollection of a historical event or a real personage survives in popular memory for two or three centuries at the utmost. This is because popular memory finds difficulty in retaining individual events and real figures. The structures by means of which it functions are different: categories instead of events, [stereotypes, not real people.]
>
> ……
>
> Sometimes. . . an investigator chances to come upon the actual transformation of an event into myth. Just before the last war, the Romanian folklorist, Constantin Brailoiu had occasion to record an admirable ballad in a village in Maramures. Its subject was a tragedy of love: the young suitor had been bewitched by a mountain fairy, and a few days before he was to be married, the fairy, driven by jealousy, had flung him from a cliff. . . .In the course of recording the variants that he was able to collect, the folklorist tried to learn the period when the tragedy had occurred; he was told that it was a very old story, which had happened "long ago." Pursuing his inquiries, however, he learned that the event had taken place not quite forty years earlier. He finally even discovered that the heroine was still alive. He went to see her and heard the story from her own lips. It was a quite commonplace tragedy: one evening her lover had slipped and fallen over a cliff; he had not died instantly; his cries had been heard by mountaineers; he had been carried to the village where he had died soon after. At the funeral, his fiancée, with the other women in the village, had repeated the customary ritual lamentations, without the slightest allusion to the mountain fairy.
>
> Thus, despite the presence of the principal witness, a few years had sufficed to strip the event of all historical authenticity, to transform it into a legendary tale. . . . When the folklorist drew the villagers' attention to the authentic version, they replied that the old woman had forgotten; that her great grief had almost destroyed her mind.

12. Religion and Reading Holy Books

For most people throughout history faith has been based on ritual, mystical experience, and following group authority, not reading holy books. They couldn't read! Increased literacy has changed things, but emphasis on reading holy books still varies greatly as Thomas Coburn explains in "The Koran, Gita, and Tripitaka," *Christian Science Monitor*, Nov. 13, 1991, pp. 12-13. Coburn is a professor of religious studies and classical languages at St. Lawrence University.

Islam is the world religion most dominated by a holy-book. Muslims believe the Koran was "revealed piecemeal to the Prophet Muhammad...between AD 610 and 632...as the flawless word of God...." By 652 a written version was completed that remains standard today. Many Muslims who cannot read have memorized large portions of it.

"The Hindu situation could not be more different....As it is with gods in Hinduism, so it is with scriptures. There are a very great number, and...region, time of year, family tradition, caste, language, century and so on" determine which ones are relied upon. The Bhagavad Gita, "Krishna's instruction on knowledge, morality and devotion" is highly prized but "the core of Hindu religion" does not lie in texts.

Other world religions are in between.

Buddhists have standard texts, or sutras. But, like Hindus, they have an "open-ended and expansive attitude." Their holy books reveal experiences of enlightenment as discovered and lived through the centuries. The teachings of Siddhartha Gautama are an important starting point, not final words. "This dynamic quality gives the Buddhist canon great diversity."[1]

Christian groups vigorously contend with one another on how books of the Bible should be interpreted. Some read them literally, as Muslims interpret the Koran. Others take a more Buddhist-like approach. Within Judaism a similar diversity exists on understanding the Torah and related materials.

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[1] Tripitaka in the article title refers to three collections--called "baskets"--of literature central to Theravada Buddhism practiced in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. There are additional collections of Buddhist scriptures from China (700 volumes each the size of the Christian Bible) and Tibet (300 more volumes).

13. Understanding Holy Books

How should holy books be read? Taken from *A History of the World's Great Religions* by Ward McAfee (New York: University Press of America, 1983, pages 146-47).

> [Until recently] historical writing was not expected to be concocted solely of scientifically verifiable facts....[O]ne wrote history...to communicate a certain religious or ethical view of life. In the ancient world, any good historical work necessarily involved much poetic imagination. A poet is concerned not only with what has happened but also with what may happen. He seeks to express that which is universal and eternal.
>
> Americans are familiar with the inspiring tale of young George Washington who chopped down a prized cherry tree, thereupon confessing the act to his father....This story was created by Mason Weems, who wrote a biography of Washington in the early 19th century. He got the idea from an event within his own family's history. Was Weems's account not historically accurate? The Weems's story is flawed only from the standards of modern historical scholarship. The main point [was Washington's noble character and integrity, and] modern biographers support this conclusion. Yet Weems's folkloric elaboration...communicated this fact...far better than [modern] "scientific" history....
>
> Similar to Weems, early Christian writers exercised a flexible hand when working with historical fact, for their highest value was not modern historical objectivity but rather their Christian faith. Similar to Jesus himself, they taught by frequent use of allegories. Whereas Jesus used timeless parables to carry his teaching, the New Testament authors drew upon analogies in the Torah to show that Jesus represented the fulfillment of Judaism.....
>
> The gospel writers sought to convey this truth--that man can be at one with God and his neighbor, that death can lose its sting,...and that man can rise above selfishness that brings only meaninglessness and despair.

14 . Critical Thinking and Holy Books

World religions today have sacred texts. Members see these as providing a firm foundation for their beliefs. Consider the views of John D. Mullen, a philosophy professor at Dowling College in Oakdale, N. Y. The reading comes from *Hard Thinking: The Reintroduction of Logic into Everyday Life.* 1995. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, pp. 75-76

> To use a privileged text as a *foundation of knowledge* is to claim that (1) something ought to be believed merely because it is asserted to be true in a privileged text, and (2) no argument needs to be made as to why that text ought to be believed.
>
> There are many problems with this approach to knowledge. If we confine ourselves to the...great religious texts, there are contradictions within them, between them, between varying interpretations of them, and between them and our most widely accepted sciences. Modern scriptural scholarship has identified the broad outlines of when [they] were written into their present forms, the fact that they were composed as well as translated over time, and that no original compositions are known to exist. What this means is that anyone who wishes to use scriptural citations as support for a claim...has an additional burden of showing why that particular text ought to be believed rather than another one. In addition to this there is another burden in most cases of showing that the text actually means what you claim it to mean. Does *Exodus* really state that the fleeing Hebrews crossed the Red Sea (in the south) or the Sea of Reeds (in the northern Nile delta)? This is a matter of scriptural scholarship.
>
> ...if any one of the scriptures does represent the ideas of the great monotheistic God, that would be good reason to use it as an authoritative source. But note that this line of reasoning is used to provide an argument in support of the reliability of scripture [itself]. But further, since different scriptures make similar claims..., there is still the burden of showing that this particular scripture, and not some others, is God's word.
>
> [Democracy] cannot exist except in an atmosphere in which the public use of reason is respected as the most fundamental decision-making procedure.

15. A Secular View on Earthly Life

The Philosophy of Humanism by Corliss Lamont is a classic statement of non-religious humanism originally published in 1949 and reprinted frequently since then. The ideas come from pages pages 13-15.

A secularist believes that things exist if they are observed by reliable observers. No spiritual world or universal mind exists outside of the natural world. She or he assumes that humans are a part of this world and there are no other dimensions. Consciousness is a product of the brain which can be studied in the same way that one studies other elements of nature. There is no separation between "mind" and brain, and no enduring individual spiritual existence exists.

Our earthly future is what creatures of the planet make it--as is true of life-forms elsewhere and in the past. Earth of 100 million years ago was what the dinosaurs, fellow creatures, and plants made it given the environment at the time. The same remains true today. Our best hopes for a desirable future--as we currently understand it--lie in our abilities to reason and use science. Religion also is a unique human endeavor, but is essentially a part of the past.

This is a way of saying that religion--including occultism--is a human attempt to survive by acquiring "power" over the natural world. But what began with Neanderthalers, if not before, is now decreasing in survival importance. Magical practices and traditional faiths now are on the downward side of the Bell-shaped curve. Almost certainly they will continue to exist into the foreseeable future but with diminished significance. At some point they will be unimportant except for their historical value. This is a secularist mode of reasoning.

Secularists are not determinists, fatalists, or optimists. They don't believe in predestination or inherent earthly harmony. The lives of future earth-creatures depend, in large part, upon decisions people make (since they are the dominant species). There is and can be no help from supernatural forces. "There is no use in our searching elsewhere for happiness and fulfillment, for there is no place else to go. We human beings must find our destiny and our promised land in the here and now, or not at all."

16. A Secular View on "Universal Truth"

We are isolated on a small planet that is third from our sun. The sun, in turn, is a rather average star on an outer spiral of a run-of-the-mill galaxy containing billions of other stars. Our galaxy--the Milky Way--is one of billions of others that make up the known universe. Is this universe permeated with Divine moral truths that are relevant to humans? Stanley Fish considers the problems involved from a skeptical standpoint. Taken from *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, page 8).

> ...it is difficult to say what [a transcendent truth] would be like. Of course we would know what it would *not* be like; it would not speak to any particular condition, or be identified with any historical production, or be formulated in the terms of any national, ethnic, racial, economic, or class traditions. In short, it would not be clothed in any of the guises that would render it available to the darkened glasses of mortal--that is temporally limited--man. It is difficult not to conclude either (a) that there are no such truths, or ... (b) that while there are such truths, they could only be known from a god's-eye view. Since none of us occupies that view (because none of us is a god), the truths any of us find compelling will be partial.... It follows that when [any person] invokes transcendent truths and urges that they be the basis of our decisions, the invocation has no [specific content for none can] say with certainty what the transcendent truth is.

Fish concludes that when people claim that their plans are sanctioned by god they are deluding themselves and/or others.

> The unavailability of any transcendent truths...can be an advantage to someone who has the skill and resources to advance the truth he or she prefers....One can reduce the strategy to a formula: first detach your agenda from its partisan origins, from its history, and then present it as a universal [command so compelling] that only the irrational or the godless...could refuse it. You can do this in many ways, but one way, tried and true, is to [use words that are honored to] generate the conclusions--the marching orders--that are the content of your politics.

17. Religion is Deeply Rooted

Phillips Stevens, Jr. is an anthropologist. In this reading he comments on the deeply-rooted "complex mix of beliefs and behaviors" called *religion* in the Western world. He also makes a suggestion for influencing people from traditions other than one's own. (From "Dealing with Religious Beliefs: Some Suggestions from Anthropology," *Free Inquiry*, vol. 16, No. 1, Winter, 1995-96, pages 24-25.)

> First, beliefs identified as religious are absolutely universal to human cultures and are as old as human history....[It] is well established that the intensity of religious belief rises with social stress and anxiety....
>
> In trying to understand the power of religious belief, we might do well to reconsider the term *belief*....We should recognize that the vast majority of the world's people *know* that there is a high god who supervises the world and who judges human behavior, and that there is a wonderful afterlife awaiting the faithful, and that there are supernatural agencies that are regularly active in human affairs. People have grown up from childhood with such convictions that have been...supported by all others in their social networks. Their sensory perceptual systems have been modified...so that some of them...actually experience the supernatural in their lives. Such experiences serve to bolster individual and societal certainty in the existence of the supernatural.

"If our aim is to change the way people think about their world" we must understand the fundamental, biologically-influenced "human sentiments and behaviors that lie at the basis of religious belief and ritual systems."

> [The] most effective way to change people's beliefs and/or practices is not to scoff at them, but to understand them and work within them while at the same time offering alternatives, so that the believers and practitioners themselves can begin to see flaws in their own systems and accept the alternatives as superior.

18 . Religion: A Psychological Perspective

We are highly intelligent, mortal beings. How do we handle this knowledge of our own eventual death? Often we busy ourselves and try not think about it. But we do, and find ourselves needing to identify with durable ideals, causes and organizations--including a sense of connection with the entire universe! This ultimate "reaching" beyond ourselves may be secular or religious in nature. Some, following in the footsteps of leaders such as Carl Sagan, achieve a sense of cosmic unity on a scientific level. Others--including some scientists--find comfort in religion. Psychiatrist Anthony Storr provides this analysis in *Feet of Clay. Saints, Sinners and Madmen* (New York: The Free Press, 1996, pages 200-06).

> Faith is experienced as being of such great personal significance that, for the believer, it constitutes the hub around which everything in life revolves. Faiths are no more [open] to reason than are delusions....It is because of this holistic, all-embracing characteristic that it is just as difficult to argue with religious faith as it is to argue with paranoid [people]....
>
> We value ourselves because our spouses, children and friends appear to be fond of us, enjoy our company, or profess love for us. [The religious person] has, in addition, the belief that God loves and values him. This is both a bonus and an insurance. The believer is, to some extent, protected from the tragedies of personal experience....Faith really can protect people against horrors.

"A man may have been abandoned by family and friends; he may be a failure, a down-and-out alcoholic, a misfit, a sinner whom the world will not forgive." Whatever his circumstances, there will be some religious group willing to take him in and convince him that he is a valued part of the cosmic scheme.

From this psychological perspective it matters little if a group is old and large with commonly accepted doctrines--or a new, small group with "bizarre" ideas. According to Storr, the specific content of any faith is seen as "at best inherently unlikely" by people not a part of the religion.

19. New Religions: The Founders

The founders of new religions are individuals, very different one from another in a variety of ways. Nonetheless, they also share many traits according to Oxford University psychiatrist Anthony Storr, author of *Feet of Clay. Saints, Sinners and Madmen: A Study of Gurus.* (1996, New York: The Free Press. "Introduction", pages xi-xvii.) Storr calls founders of new religions *gurus*, a Sanskrit word meaning one "'who brings light out of darkness.'" However different they are, gurus claim special spiritual insight. They offer "new paths to salvation."

Their revelations often come during a period of extreme trauma--physical or emotional crisis. (See the reading, "Altered States of Consciousness.") During this period of stress the person thinks messages are coming from God, God's angels, superior beings from outer space or through other cosmic channels. This supernatural communication, in turn, is seen as instrumental to his or her subsequent personal recovery.

Regardless of origin, Storr says that a guru generalizes the vision, applying it to *everyone* wanting salvation. Emotional "certainty...accounts to a large extent for his powerful effect upon others; his persuasiveness....is closely linked with intensity of conviction."

Gurus are self-selected like politicians. No particular schooling or other qualifications are needed. Anyone can claim spiritual enlightenment. From a historical standpoint, some gurus have demonstrated "holiness, lack of personal ambition and integrity." But power tends to corrupt religious founders as well as other people. It's "intoxicating to be adored," and easy to become involved in "behavior which would be condemned...in an ordinary person." For instance, being surrounded by devoted, willing-to-do-anything followers is a sexual temptation. Gurus also may be tempted by luxurious living very different from lifestyles required of followers.

Generally, gurus are "intolerant of...criticism." Divine communication undercuts democratic decision-making or having equal associates. More often, believers--in the name of spiritual exercise--perform lengthy, meaningless and sometimes harmful tasks to show faithfulness. In short, the historical record is littered with "false prophets, madmen, confidence tricksters, or unscrupulous psychopaths who exploit their disciples...."

20. New Religions: The Members

Eileen Barker is the author of *New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1989). The information comes from pages 11 and 12.

Barker says that members of a new religious movement (NRM) likely differ from the general population in age distribution. Often "there will be few babies and young children and not many middle-aged or elderly members." This membership distribution means that leadership positions commonly are in the hands of "young and inexperienced" people, a cause "for some of the more extreme actions carried out by NRMs." If a NRM survives, it likely will become institutionalized as time passes. That is, "parents in their thirties are likely to have a very different outlook on life from that of idealists with few responsibilities in their twenties."

The members of a NRM are:

> likely to consist of converts....Throughout history,... first generation members have tended to be far more enthusiastic than [those in] mainstream religious traditions.... A NRM typically offers a direct and unambiguous promise of salvation....[Its beliefs] are held more fervently, and are often more simple and absolute than the...complicated beliefs of religions that have responded to the shifting and [multiple] concerns of successive generations.... [A] new religion may appear passionate and caring....In short, a new religion is more likely to offer immediacy and certainty than the mainstream religions, which may appear remote and [undedicated]--especially to an impatient youth seeking a clear solution to the complex problems of today's world, or their own personal problems.
>
> [A NRM] may...be far more demanding of its members' time and commitment; it may be more vigorously convinced that it alone holds the truth and, consequently, it may be less ready to adapt to circumstances.

21. No One Ever Joins a Cult

People do not decide to support "a cult" says Philip Zimbardo, past president of the American Psychological Association. Rather, they "join interesting groups that promise to fulfill their pressing needs." Taken from "PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIETY: What messages are behind today's cults?" *APA Monitor*, May, 1997, page 14.

> Imagine being part of a group in which you will find instant friendship, a caring family, respect for your contributions, an identity, safety, security, simplicity, and an organized daily agenda. You will learn new skills, have a respected position, gain personal insight, improve your personality and intelligence. There is no crime or violence and [a] healthy lifestyle....
>
> Your leader may promise not only to heal any sickness and foretell the future, but give you the gift of immortality, if you are a true believer. In addition, your group's [creed] represents a unique spiritual/religious agenda (in other cults it is political, social or personal enhancement) that if followed, will enhance the Human Condition somewhere in the world or cosmos.
>
> Who would fall for such appeals? Most of us, if they were made by someone we trusted, in a setting that was familiar, and especially if we had unfulfilled needs. Much cult recruitment is done by family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, teachers and highly trained professional recruiters. They recruit not on the streets or airports, but in contexts that are 'home bases" for the potential recruit; at schools, in the home, coffee houses, on the job, at sports events, lectures, churches, or drop-in dinners and free personal assessment workshops. The Heaven's Gate group made us aware that recruiting is now also active in the Internet and across the World Wide Web....
>
> Cults promise to fulfill most of those personal needs and [provide] solutions to...complex world problems. [A typical leader will claim to have found a] simple path to happiness, to success, to salvation....

One needs only to follow the group rules--live the required lifestyle! To people in a "transitional phase in life" it seems to be a "'win-win' trade."

22 Cults and the U. S. Marine Corps

Comparing cults with an authoritarian organization like the U.S. Marine Corps provides insight. Margaret Singer and Janja Lalich say they are different. Taken from *Cults in Our Midst* (1995. Jossey-Bass) as found in the *American Family Foundation News*, Vol 2, No. 4, 1996, pages 3-4.

The Marine recruit:

1. Knows the nature of the organization being joined. There are no secret stages such as are found in many cults.
2. Keeps freedom of religion, politics, friends, family associations, who to marry as well as access to the media.
3. Serves for a term that is known ahead of time and then freely departs.
4. Has full medical care while a member of the Corps that is based upon standard scientific practices. Physical fitness based upon scientific understanding is encouraged. Adequate and properly balanced nourishment is provided.
5. Knows that his records are public and available to him. He is protected by Inspector General procedures.
6. There is an established and known military legal system, and a Marine can utilize off-base legal and law enforcement agencies. And, the whole military system is reviewed by outsiders including relevant committees in the U. S. Congress.
7. Can send her or his children to public or private schools of their choice.
8. Is aware that military superiors must operate within the laws of the land--as opposed to various cult leaders who may consider themselves above the law.
9. Keeps paychecks and property as well as presents and inheritances.
10. Is encouraged to act rationally, to avoid fallacies. Reading, education and knowledge through a variety of educational agencies is encouraged. One is not closed off from the outside world.
11. Has established channels through which she or he can voice grievances.
12. Is not used for medical or psychological experiments without consent.

23. Avoiding Destructive Groups: A Review

Quotes from "PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIETY: What messages are behind today's cults?" by Philip Zimbardo, *Monitor*, May, 1997, page 14. The *Monitor* is published by the American Psychological Association. Zimbardo is a past president of the organization.

1. People are most vulnerable during life transitions and/or when feeling socially defeated or inadequate.

Perhaps a person has moved "to a new city or country, lost a job, dropped out of school, [had] parents divorced, [a] romantic relationship broken, [or has given up on] traditional religion....Add to the recipe, all those who find their work tedious and trivial, education meaningless, social life absent or inconsistent, family remote or dysfunctional, friends too busy to find time for you and trust in government eroded...."

2. The ability to spot standard propaganda techniques--such as the singular causation fallacy--provides protection.

> In general, cult leaders offer simple solutions....They offer [a] simple path to happiness, to success, to salvation... Cult methods of recruiting, indoctrinating and influencing their members are not exotic forms of mind-control, but...intensely applied [ordinary] tactics of social influence practiced daily by all compliance professionals and societal agents of influence.

3. We are more likely to be influenced by in-group members than by out-group individuals.

"Much cult recruitment is done by family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, teachers and highly trained professional recruiters." It is more likely to be successful at one of our "home bases," than when done by strangers "on the streets or in airports."

24. Individual Freedom vs. Group Religious Freedom

Benjamin Zablocki, a sociologist at Rutgers University has specialized in communal living. He recommends these groups adopt a "Bill of Inalienable Rights." From *Communities*, No. 88, Fall, 1995, pp. 8, 10-11.

Inalienable Rights...

I. Right to Leave. Any adult person may leave the community at any time without the need to give a reason and without the need for a waiting period....

II. Right to Maintain Contact with Outside World. At least once a year a designated family member from the outside world may meet with any relative living in the community in a neutral location...for at least two hours without witnesses...or electronic surveillance. [In addition] incoming and outgoing first-class mail shall not be censored.

III. Right of Invalids and the Elderly to Continued Support. Invalids and elderly people who have participated in the productive life of the community for many years are entitled to some degree of economic support....

IV. Right of Children to a Future with Some Degree of Free Choice....It must be remembered that, unlike their parents, they have not freely chosen this way of life. Therefore, every effort will be made to assure that these children learn something of the outside world and of how to survive in [it].

V. Right to an Education. Every child...is entitled to an education....The child's...relatives not living in the community have a right to see the child's education records at least once a year....

VI. Right to Clearly Defined Health Maintenance Procedures....The community shall define its procedures in writing [and how these differ from secular standards. These] shall be freely available.

VII. Right to Freedom from Sexual or Marital Compulsion.

VIII. Right to Moderation and Common Sense in...Discipline. Torture (as defined by Amnesty International) will never be used.

IX. Right to Expect Honesty in Proselytizing. [People] will be told honestly [at the] first meeting...aims and procedures of the community.

X. Right to Impartial Investigation....If there is a pattern of complaints,...the community agrees to cooperate with reasonable efforts of a neutral fact-finding committee.

25. Religion and Evolutionary Development

In-group loyalty is a reoccurring theme in this unit, but how did such loyalties develop. Some experts such as Ralph Burhoe believe that religion provides a large part of the answer. (*Toward a Scientific Theology,* Ottawa, Canada: Christian Journals Limited, 1981)

Many insects and animals will sacrifice themselves for their young and close relatives, but that is all. Non-relatives are competitors, and to favor them at the expense of one is kin would mean that, eventually, one's own genes will become extinct. (Burhoe recommends *The Selfish Gene* by Richard Dawkins. New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 1989.)

How was it that our ancestors were able to break through this genetic requirement of self-interest? How did they acquire an ability to be altruistic toward non-relatives? Become willing to work and sacrifice for the good of large groups not related by kinship?

According to Burhoe, large cooperative human communities consisting of unrelated individuals became possible when intellectualized concepts of oneness (in-group identity) supplemented human biology (shared genes). A supposed spirit world psychologically united biologically unrelated people.

Burhoe says religion is the cultural foundation that made possible later large-scale human organizations. Without the discovery/invention of religion, there might be no human life today. All primates would be much like gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos (miniature chimps) who lack religion.

Is this analysis sensible? If not, why not? If so, does continued human understanding depend upon maintaining vibrant religion belief? Is it a relic of our evolutionary past? Something that was necessary in its time but that now can be dispensed with? Is it like a person's appendix in this regard? If not, why not?

26 . Changes in Western Concepts of God

Sydney J. Harris was a leading newspaper columnist and essayist for many years. His books include *Pieces of Eight* (1982) and *Clearing the Ground* in 1986. This reading comes from his *Chicago Sun-Times* essay published Dec. 9th, 1981. (Note the male-oriented language common at the time.)

> All this argument and controversy about the evolution of man, and no thought about the evolution of God [in the Western world]. In the beginning, in the first books of the Old Testament, we find a vengeful as well as a gracious god, a tribal god exacting duty and devotion by ritual and sacrifice.
>
> Then, as the Bible progresses, we find a strange thing happening. God himself changes, in the eyes of the Israelites. He becomes less fearsome and more compassionate; he expands from a tribal to a universal deity; as men grew in understanding, God grew in stature.
>
> At first, he rejoiced in the slaying of Israel's enemies. But by the time of the Babylonian Exile, he was already depicted as a god who wept that the Egyptians were drowning in the Red Sea after the Israelites had safely crossed over. He cries, "Are the Egyptians not my children too?" (This may be found in *Midrash*, the earliest commentary on the Hebrew scriptures.)
>
> And by the time we reach the great prophets,... man has discovered a god who is far closer to the precepts and parables of Rabbi Jesus than most of us realize. Many of Jesus' sayings are direct quotations or paraphrases of the Old Testament, for he never considered himself anything but a pious Jew....
>
> The ministry of Jesus was a further liberation from ritual for its own sake ("It is not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him, but what comes out of it.") It was an evolutionary breakthrough in man's conception of the creator and his relation to us....
>
> God grows, as we grow, for he reflects what we become; and when we grow to the fullest, we will have the fullest god....

27. Religion and Science: One Scientist's View

Bernard Leikind, a plasma physicist discusses the differences between religion and science as seen from a scientific perspective. The reading comes from "Can Science Prove God?" *Skeptic.* Vol. 3, No. 4, 1995, page 57.

> One characteristic of scientific knowledge that sets it apart from other forms of knowledge--such as metaphysics and theology--is its universal quality. When IBM researchers discovered high temperature superconductors in Switzerland, others made them in Texas, Japan, and India as well.
>
> Another distinguishing characteristic of scientific knowledge is that its truth does not depend on whether you believe it. By following the proper instructions anyone could have made the new superconductors even if they did not believe the Swiss reports. Conversely, cold fusion doesn't work anywhere...
>
> Knowledge about God, on the other hand, seems to have a different quality. For most people, it seems, what they know about God is what their parents knew about God. A Japanese native, believing in the Shinto spirits of ancient Japan and the godless Buddhism, may find the Christian's conclusive proofs of the resurrection of Jesus a puzzle. A Hindu seeking evidence of God's many avatars [earthly forms] may be mystified by the poor three-in-one god...of the West. Cultures create religious beliefs, and [faith] makes them true for believers.
>
> The scientists' claim of universality does not mean that scientists believe that they know everything or even that they agree about everything they know. It only means that the fundamental theories of science seem to be getting more comprehensive and more accurate. To properly practice scientific research, a student must read the latest texts and commentary.

Religious training requires different procedures. "To properly practice a religion, an acolyte [student] will read the words of its founder, and church organizations will work hard to prevent later writers from deviating from the canonical [holy] teaching even slightly."

28. Religion and Science: A Second Scientist's View

Do science and religion place a thinking person in an either/or position? Must one abandon one in order to accept the other? Stephen Jay Gould -- who is noted for his writings on science--says no. The reading comes from page 400 of *Bully for Brontosaurus: Reflections in Natural History.* 1991, New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

> ...no battle exists between science and religion--the two most separate spheres of human need. A titanic struggle occurs, always has, always will, between questioning and authority, free inquiry and frozen dogma--but the institutions representing these poles are not science and religion. These struggles occur *within* each field, not primarily across disciplines. The general ethic of science leads to greater openness, but we have our fossils, often in positions of great power. Organized religion, as an arm of state power so frequently in history, has tended to rigidity--but theologies have also speareheaded social revolution. Official religion [as such] has not opposed evolution....Many prominent evolutionists have been devout, and many churchmen have placed evolution at the center of their personal theologies. Henry Ward Beecher, America's premier [preacher] during Darwin's century, defended evolution as God's way in a striking commercial metaphor: "Design by wholesale is grander than design by retail"--better, that is, to ordain general laws of change than to make such species by separate [command].
>
> The struggle of free inquiry against authority is so central, so pervasive that we need all the help we can get from every side. Inquiring scientists must join hands with questioning theologians if we wish to preserve that most fragile of all reeds, liberty itself. If scientists lose their natural allies by casting entire institutions as enemies, and not seeking bonds with soul mates on other paths, then we only make a difficult struggle that much harder.

29. Religion and Science: A Third Scientist's View

Edward O. Wilson is a professor of science at Harvard University and one of the founders of sociobiology. In 1986 he was one of four scientists invited by American Roman Catholic Bishops to participate in an exploration of relationships between science and religion. His address to the bishops is reprinted in the Spring, 1991 issues of *Free Inquiry* along with an "Epilogue." The article is entitled "Scientific Humanism and Religion," pages 20-23 and 56. Quoted material comes from page 56. The first paragraph is from the "Epilogue" and the second is Wilson's concluding statement to the bishops.

> If I'm right about the deep biological origins of religion, no amount of debunking and confrontation will significantly alter the colossi of organized religions. They won't collapse like the Soviet empire, . . .the sacred texts won't crumble like the Berlin Wall. But the great organized religions can. . . evolve through friendly truth and reason laid forth in conciliatory style.
>
> [Whether] scientific materialism or religious transcendentalism proves correct will eventually make a very great difference in how humanity views itself and plans its future. But, for the years immediately ahead, this distinction makes little difference. . . .the best relation between religion and science [is] an uneasy but fruitful alliance. The role of religion is to codify and put into enduring poetic form the highest moral values of a society consistent with empirical knowledge and to lead in moral reasoning. The role of science is to test remorselessly every conclusion about human nature and to search for the bedrock of ethics--by which I mean the material basis of natural law. Science faces in religion its most interesting challenge, while religion will find in science the necessary means to meet the modern age.

For additional information on Wilson's beliefs read Part III of *Three Scientists and Their Gods* by Robert Wright (New York: Times Books, 1988, pages 111-193.) Edward Fredkin and Kenneth Boulding are the other two scientists whose views are explored at length.

30. Can Religion and Science Be Interwoven?

Ian Barbour believes religion and science successfully can be interwoven if one views the natural world as a dynamic web of interconnected events that extends from sub-atomic particles through humans to the whole cosmos. In his view cosmic understanding requires more than just analyzing parts (reductionism). This page comes from *Religion in an Age of Science*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1990, pages 28-29). The book is based on Barbour's lectures given at the University of Aberdeen in 1989.

> Nature is characterized by change, chance, and novelty as well as order. It is incomplete and still coming into being. We can learn a lot by taking things apart and examining them (reductionism), but we should then look at how bits and piece merge to create "higher levels or organization." Because people are a part of nature, "human experience can be taken as a clue to interpreting the experience of other beings. Genuinely new [things] emerge in evolutionary history, but [basic scientific laws continue to] apply to all events.
>
> Process thinkers understand God to be the source of novelty and order. [They view creation as an] incomplete process. God elicits the self-creation of individual entities, thereby allowing for freedom and novelty as well as order and structure. God is not...the Unmoved Mover, but instead [is] an influence on all events.... [Every event is] jointly the product of the entity's past, its own action, and the action of God....God transcends the world but [also is] in the structure of each event. We do not have a succession of purely natural events, interrupted by gaps in which God alone operates.
>
> Process [thinkers] reject the idea of divine omnipotence [absolute power]; they believe in a God of persuasion rather than compulsion. [They provide for] chance, human freedom, evil, and suffering in the world....

They believe in the "goal of enhancing the richness of experience in any form...without treating all forms of life as equally valuable." In Barbour's view religious process thinkers present "a powerful vision of a just and sustainable society in an interdependent community of life."

Part III

Illustrations

(Visually "Thinking About Religion")

Visual art is a cultural universal. Young children learn by drawing, and this desire to produce pictures remains. Think of graffiti, the camera, doodling and student poster-making.

Many of our students produce unit-related art for their application activities. Depending on their skills, they "color for credit," create overhead transparency masters, make posters for bulletin board display, or "dress up" their unadorned texts.

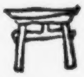
Art is an area where students can display individual style almost regardless of ability. In a given class some efforts may be quite elementary while other members display almost professional capabilities. All are encouraged. It is an effective way for students to remember concepts, and one's classroom can be effectively decorated with relevant student work.

The illustrations on the pages that follow are examples of elementary drawing abilities. Nonetheless, these sketches have been effective motivators. Seeing them, students can think to themselves, "I can do better than that!"

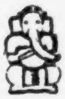
1. Life-Centering Symbols

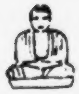
Until the last few centuries most people could not read or write even if a written form of their language existed. Visual symbols and rituals were central to belief systems around the world. Images and ceremony continue to be extremely important. They trigger deeply-felt emotions, help people identify with one another and comprehend complex beliefs.

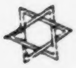
On this page draw a symbol that has life-centering significance for you or a member of your family. Some standard religious symbols are provided for reference, and one of these may be copied. Think also about secular images--flags, the Statue of Liberty and dollar signs. After you've made your sketch briefly describe a group ceremony in which it likely would be used. Then answer this question: *When does strong attachment to a particular symbol become harmful or dangerous?*

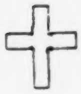


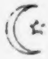
SYMBOL CEREMONY/DANGER

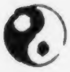






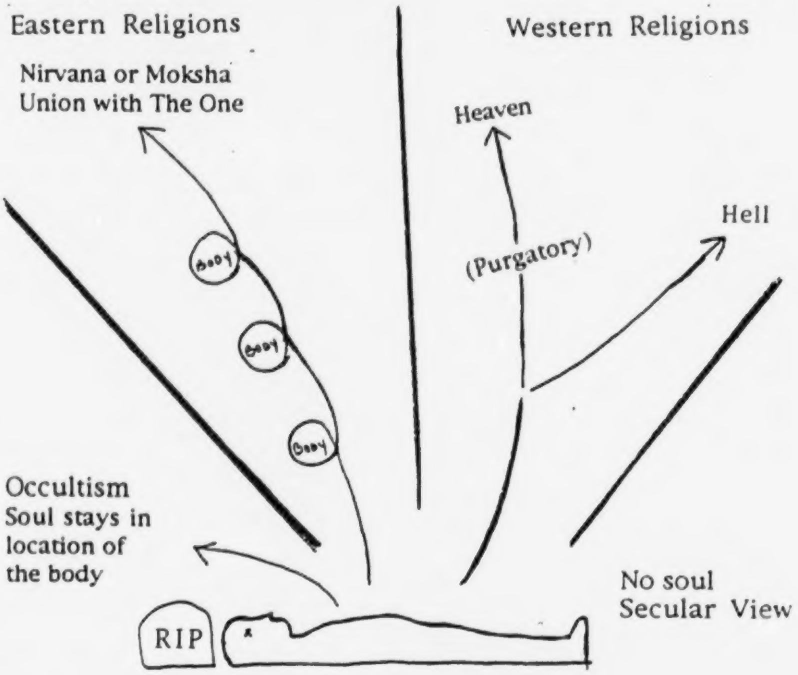






Images of the Soul

Where do you fit in? Should the illustration be revised to reflect your beliefs? If so, how? Or, draw a different one.


Eastern Religions
Western Religions
Nirvana or Moksha
Union with The One
Body
Body
Body
Heaven
(Purgatory)
Hell
Occultism
Soul stays in
location of
the body
No soul
Secular View
RIP

1. Atheists say souls don't exist. Agnostics are doubtful.

2. Some followers of Western faiths assume a physical-like continuation, others do not. Some believe in eternal punishment (hell). Others think evil-doers are only separated from God, or their souls are annihilated.

3. In some religious traditions souls can be cleansed after death. They go through a purgatory before reaching their final destination.

4. Hindus and Buddhists generally believe in non-personal bliss. Descriptive illustrations include a dewdrop (individual soul) falling into the ocean (God)--or dreamless sleep following a series of reincarnations.

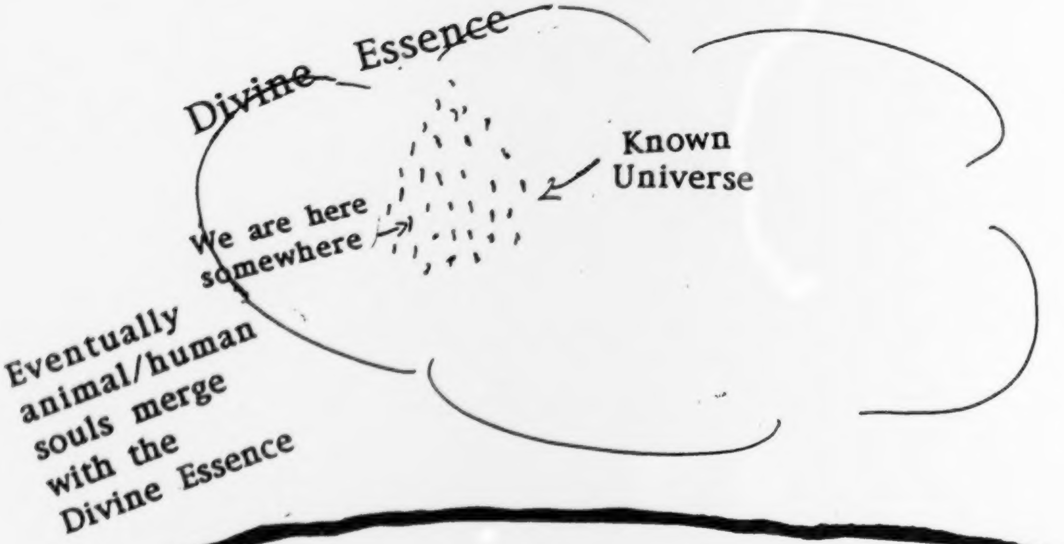
5. New-Agers may convert reincarnation into a soul odyssey (physical to non-physical) going from galaxy to galaxy.

6. Jewish people may not emphasize soul-concepts. Serving God on this earth provides its own rewards.

7. Occultists and spiritualists assume that departed souls remain in the location where they lived earthly lives, communicating with the living.

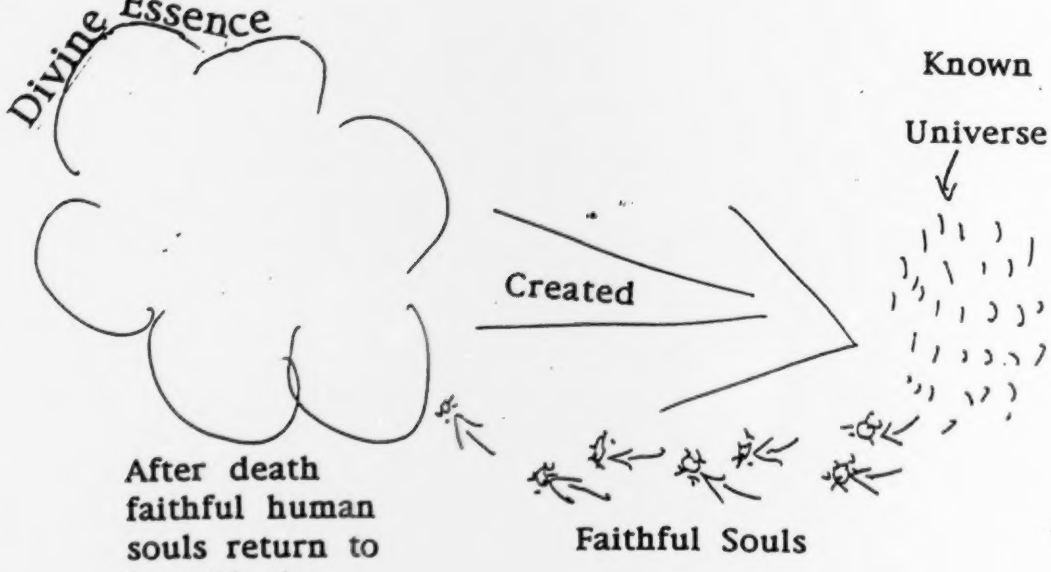
Pantheism and Dualism

-Pantheism-


Divine Essence
Known Universe
We are here somewhere

Eventually animal/human souls merge with the Divine Essence

-Dualism-


Divine Essence
Known Universe
Created
Faithful Souls

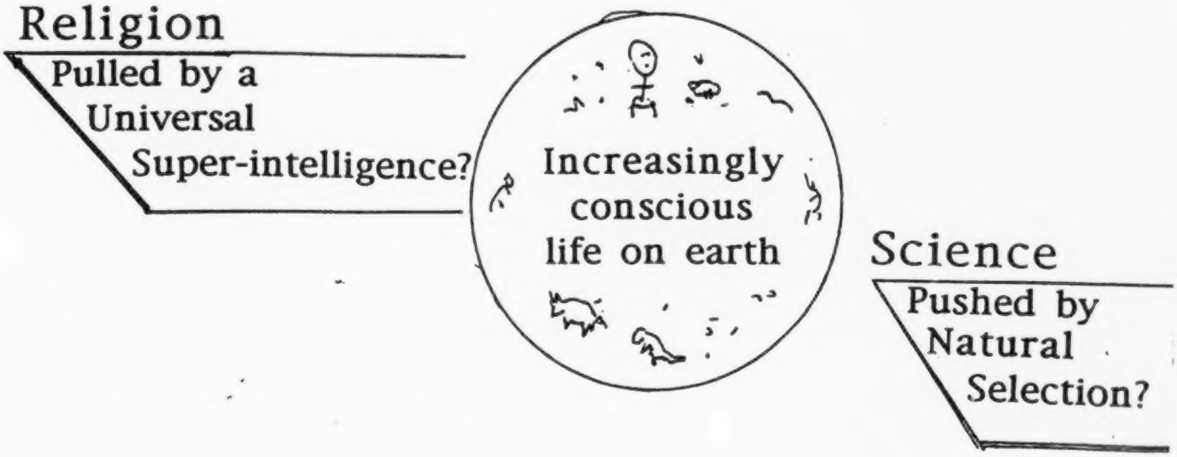
After death faithful human souls return to be with the Divine essence

Religious "Pulling" and Natural "Pushing"

Most living forms on earth have remained extremely simple, bacteria for example. A small percentage have evolved into complex organisms with nervous systems and brains. These have produced degrees of consciousness, self-awareness and intelligent behavior.

Human (and animal) consciousness grew out of non-consciousness. Religious people assume this happened because there is a universal intelligence, or God, "pulling" creatures toward divine understanding. This is called a *teleological* frame of reference.

Non-religious scholars such as Richard Dawkins, author of *The Blind Watchmaker*, reject this idea. They believe humans have been randomly "pushed" into consciousness through natural selection. Teleological assumptions, they say, are false. Humans are evolutionary accidents just as dinosaurs were. Life has the meaning we give it.


Religion
Pulled by a Universal Super-intelligence?
Increasingly conscious life on earth
Science
Pushed by Natural Selection?

Are we being "pulled" supernaturally through religion toward God? ...Pulled, but only through natural cause and effect?...Pushed randomly by evolutionary pressures? ...Something else? What is your view?

Textbook Paintings

John Abrahamson, a former Riverside-Brookfield High School student, is the artist whose paintings introduce the *Student Text* chapters.

These can be a basis for class discussion, unit review or evaluation. For instance, ask: What aspects of the chapter did the artist focus upon? Does the painting help you more clearly understand unit ideas? What common elements link all or most of the plates? What is the artist trying to accomplish through these links? Rank the paintings according to artistic achievement and helpfulness in understanding chapter content.

One can formulate questions for specific plates. Why are the boy and girl on opposite sides of a fence yet in communication? How are the Chapter One and Two paintings similar? Different? Why? Look at the shadows in the cave painting. What is their significance in regard to "thinking about religion"? How can this painting be compared with one of Plato's allegories? What does the boat symbolize? What was Abrahamson trying to say when he produced a painting of a big question mark, carrot and rod?

Thinking About Religion

From A Global Perspective

Teacher's Manual

Brant Abrahamson

Fred Smith

THE
TEACHERS'
PRESS

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Foreword

Riverside-Brookfield (public) High School is located in the near-western suburbs of Chicago. The authors taught world history (Global Area Studies), government and sociology at R-BHS from the 1960s through the early 1990's. During these years we incorporated the study of religion into these courses when appropriate. We learned that one can succeed if she or he proceeds carefully.

Adolescents are in the process of achieving their own identities as distinct from those of their parents. As they become their own persons, they tend to rebel in minor and sometimes major ways. Those who have religious parents may search for self-identity by questioning the family belief system.

This breaking away process is painful for parents as well as for children, especially if young people seem to be questioning family religious beliefs. Parents can become distraught, and there is a temptation to scapegoat. In such circumstances it is easy to pinpoint a teacher and accuse that person of eroding the child's faith.

This situation is difficult for instructors. We don't want to contribute to student anomie or to acerbate parent/child conflicts. Neither can we easily abandon our training, which probably has given us a religious understanding beyond the Sunday School religion of our childhoods. As a consequence we often lapse into silence.

To avoid saying nothing on a topic that I believe to be extremely important, I developed a series of lessons on religious understandings that have worked well. The one that accompanies this material is called "The Religious View of Life," (Chapter One of the student text).

In this lesson I try to get students to view world religions from a perspective not previously considered. It tends to propel them mentally beyond the details of their religious beliefs that may divide them from their classmates. Whatever my classroom combination of Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, or members of other faiths, I can say to them, "You are all together. You share a common life perspective."

By concentrating on this perspective, I can avoid the non-historical specific beliefs concerning virgin births, newly born children delivering philosophical orations, and similar traditional accounts that trigger adrenaline flows. I can communicate my knowledge in a positive and intellectually honest way. Finally, I can disarm community people who may be potentially hostile. I have my printed materials, which I can show them and say, "This is what I teach. To what do you object?"

Brant Abrahamson, 1998

Part I Defining Religion/Western Orientation

Definitions of religion come in several categories. Substantive and functional definitions are two that are commonly used.

In 1915 Emile Durkheim provided a substantive definition that is still used today. He defined religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden--beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them."[1] Writing in 1995 Lester Kurtz, author of *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective* , says that by eliminating " the ethnocentric term 'Church' [Durkheim] gives us a still serviceable definition that points to the four major sociological components. **Religion**, then, consists of the beliefs, practices (rituals), the sacred, and the community or social organization of people who are drawn together by a religious tradition" (Kurtz, page 9). The definition I give to students focuses upon the *belief* aspect of Durkheim's definition. Religion includes the idea that:

a. There is a cosmic or divine universal order that includes an ethical system.
b. These ethics--or moral code--can be known to humans at least to a degree.
c. People have a duty to follow this moral order as they perceive it.
d. One's earthly life and/or fate after death is effected by degrees of compliance.
e. A belief system is maintained through sacred stories, rituals and other means.

This kind of definition can be contrasted to functional perspectives. For instance, in his college text, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, Keith Roberts says, "I seek to explore anything that provides meaning and purpose in the lives of people. I tend to ask *how* people are religious rather than *whether* they are religious" (Roberts, page 21).[2]

Our substantive Durkheim-like definition seems close to the usage found in the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution (that most high school students learn). It helps a teacher avoid becoming entangled in arguments as to whether "secular humanism" is a religion or student suggestions that a sport such as football can be "one's religion!" It corresponds to the assumptions of those students who are "non-religious." At the same time one can unite students regardless of their religious beliefs by stating that all can have secular beliefs--such as valuing democracy--that bring them together regardless of how they view the divine.

---

[1] *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, page 62.

[2] Nonetheless Roberts limits in a substantive way what he calls religion. "I have suggested that a world view and an ethical system are intrinsic aspects of religion. A feeling of awe or sacredness is not considered religious in this text unless it includes a cognitive pattern that helps people make sense out of life and that helps explain the meaning of suffering, death and injustice" (page 22).

Organizations that generally fulfill the definition are considered religious. Others may be partly religious or almost completely secular. Theravada Buddhism (now centered in Sri Lanka and mainland southeast Asia) is a religion. The classic Buddhist statement includes the idea that life is suffering rooted in desire. One eliminates suffering by overcoming desire through right knowledge, aspiration, speech, behavior, livelihood, effort and so forth. Determining how best to follow this "Eightfold Path" may be an individual effort with no help from any god. Nonetheless, there is an assumption of a divine moral order toward which humans should aspire, and reaching Nirvana is a goal. The Unitarian/Universalist Church includes both religious and secular people. Some view their ethics as rooted in a divine moral order, others do not. Confucianism basically is a secular philosophy. It provides a framework for a "well-ordered society" as does belief in democracy.

The definition is Western-oriented, as one might expect. The whole attempt to teach about world religion from an empathetic and critical thinking standpoint is rooted in Western concepts of informal logic, objectivity and non-ethnocentrism. Multi-cultural sensitivity is a Western movement. In a broad sense, any secular/religious division of culture presumes a dualism rooted in a Western view of life.

Part II Teaching and Believing

Teachers like others have religious and/or secular values. What does one tell students about these values, if anything? How can one keep strongly held beliefs from resulting in biased teaching? Many parents along with local leaders are very fearful that teacher bias will negatively impact their young people. What should one do to keep the classroom from becoming a religious war zone?

What should one tell students about personal beliefs? When a teacher begins a unit on religion, she or he should be prepared for the question, "What is your religion?" Often it is one of the first questions students ask, and it is a legitimate question. Students have a right to know an instructor's biases! They are attempting to do some source analysis for which they should be praised--if one is using a critical thinking perspective. It is a question that an instructor should think through ahead of time. How is one to respond?

Perhaps more often than not teachers share religious values found in the community. In this case openness and the best policy. For instance, one can say, "My personal views are Christian, but now I'm trying to see the world through the eyes of a Hindu." Or, "My family is Muslim, and I am too." Or, "My parents had no religious affiliation, and I suppose that is one reason why I try to understand other's religious beliefs."

Our long-time department chair was an excellent teacher. By using his Roman Catholic upbringing he could make students sensitive to how people with deep religious feelings interpret events. Another member uses her Jewish heritage effectively. One of the authors has Amish/Mennonite ancestors, and he refers to their beliefs from time to time. It seems to help establish a commonality with the deeply religious students without alienating those from non-religious homes.

Or, challenge students to decide for themselves what a teacher believes. For instance, say "I'm going to present the world and human's place in it as seen by a Daoist. I'm going to do the best job that I can, and you determine if these are my personal beliefs. Later we'll base our discussion on this question." The (often lively) discussion is held, and almost certainly some students will ask, "Who is right?" And, the teacher responds by saying, "I can't tell you yet because we are going to be studying more religious perspectives. In other lessons, I'm going to try to present Muslim, Christian and Jewish beliefs fairly--in ways members would approve. Then, I'll ask you the same questions again!"

In summary, there are many ways that one can effectively respond--if one has thought through a strategy ahead of time.

Non-biased Classroom Instruction: A public school teacher should be objective and empathetic when describing a religion. While this statement may sound self-evident, it is easier said than done. The biases that we have color our teaching about religion just as it does our discussions of politics. How do we keep them in check?

One can imagine that there is a highly educated member of the faith being discussed sitting in the classroom. And, one concentrates on making explanations and activities acceptable to this person. Ask students who adhere to the faith, "Did I present your views in a fair manner? Did I give any false impressions? What should I correct?" Encourage them to find other authorities whose ideas and credentials can be analyzed.[1] Prod them into investigating their own faiths. Give them class credit for interviewing their religious leaders.

New religions pose a special challenge in this regard. How do we discuss them? Do we approach them with the same seriousness of purpose that we use when describing established faiths? Most of us would not ridicule one of the established world religions, but what about those that have developed this century? Should we have different set of rules based upon age? Are the leaders of new religions correct when they say that we are biased against them?

From history we know that when people of differing traditions are thrown together, there will be attempts to reconcile differences and to develop new understandings of humans' place in the universe. Because many Americans come from very diverse backgrounds, an astonishing array of new religions have evolved in the United States during the last 200 years. Most do not survive, but a few do. How do we deal with them in our classes?

Parents and Local Religious Leaders. Attempts to instruct children on how groups of people have viewed the deity involves some danger. We recommend maintaining close contacts with parents, guardians and local community leaders.

Contact parents and guardians at the beginning of a course. Send them an initial student assignment sheet, and offer to continue doing so for later units. I solicit their input on a unit by unit basis. Invite them to class, and help them work their way through visitation rules. (The Addenda includes a sample cover letter to parents.)

If problems arise over matters of religious instruction, it will be within a previously established positive relationship. At these times, show respect. Mostly listen, using conflict resolution techniques. For instance, try to state a (possibly) disturbed parent's position better that he or she does.

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[1] Developing guidelines for evaluating authorities is a major focus in the critical thinking course, and the topic is emphasized in the world history curriculum as well. (A summary of our procedures appears in the Winter, 1991, issue of *Magazine of History*, Vol. 5, No. 3, page 60.)

Work with members of the local clergy. Welcome those who want to visit the class. If college-trained, they are valuable resource people. Teachers should call upon them. Generally they know their religious history better than we do. For example, a local Catholic priest likely can provide details regarding the Crusades not known by most teachers. In diverse communities, an instructor cannot possibly know the doctrines of all the family faiths of her or his students. So, one might have field trips to community places of worship and, perhaps, invite guest speakers who don't proselytize.

Be aware of the possibility of "stealth evangelism." American Civil Liberties Union leaders believe that it is inappropriate for clergy to speak in public school classrooms. (For example, see Rob Boston's article, "Stealth Evangelism," in the Oct., 1994 issue of *Church & State*, pages 4-8.) As when driving a car or engaging in any activity that involves an element of danger, one exercises caution, and then goes ahead. Rarely if ever have I had to go beyond reminding speakers to preface their statements by saying "We believe that...." Without any exceptions that I can remember, community religious leaders are aware of the difference between "teaching religious belief" which they do in their places of worship and teaching public high school students *about* their religion.

Dealing with "abhorrent" religious practices. What should one do when particular religious practices are abhorrent from the standpoint of one's personal beliefs? As one example, what does one say about religiously-based gender roles that require enforced female seclusion or submission to males? Suttee? How can one be empathetic--or non-ethnocentric--yet not abandon personal, community and cultural moral standards?

In these situations we use the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*" of 1948 as a standard. The "Preamble" of the *Universal Declaration* --found in many sources including the last chapter of the *Student Text*--begins with these words: "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...." After the Preamble the authors say, "Now, therefore, The General Assembly Proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations...." Thirty articles follow. Article 1 states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Article 2 says that "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."

At the same time, we need to recognize that belief in human equality--appropriate for our classrooms--is an assumption. Its "rightness" cannot be proven scientifically any more than can a religious doctrine. Our students' families may have different beliefs, alternative standards of what is "right." Many religions are hierarchal, very non-democratic. Members believe they should obey specific leaders perceived to know divine will. Gender roles may be narrowly defined, different from one another and imposed. "Proper" child-rearing can be authoritarian. How should one respond? The following suggestions may be helpful:

1. Avoid false assumptions. Specific families from an authoritarian faith system may share this perspective only tentatively, or not at all. There are great differences within all established religions. Organizations that are authoritarian in non-democratic nations may operate quite differently in the United States.

2. Be honest about practices found in various faiths, but focus on those aspects most worthy of respect from a democratic point of view. Teach students to do likewise.

3. Separate personal crusades from one's teaching. Classroom proselytizing--secular or religious--is likely to backfire. Work toward family support for one's efforts.

4. Obey existing laws. Evidence of beaten children--or sick children not receiving standard medical care--must be reported. A parent's (or teacher's) belief about divine commands is not a relevant consideration under the law.

Dealing with Religious Conflict. Dealing with religious struggles for power in an objective, fair and historically justified manner is easiest when these battles were fought long ago and far away. They are most difficult when dealing with religiously-charged current issues. For instance, many Americans get upset with the ways that leaders of new cult-like religions seek converts and try to control the lives of existing members. Their tactics may be reprehensible, and we must teach our young how to recognize deception wherever it is found. But by what standards are the founders of new religions being judged? What comparisons are being made? Methods used by religious leaders in the past? Those employed by leaders of established faiths today?

When teaching about a particular religion, we focus upon members' perception of their relation with the divine--however interpreted. We separate this study from analysis of religious conflict, a topic found in the *Analysis Materials* booklet. See "Case Study Two: Religion and Exercising Influence."

Part III Important Distinctions

Religion and Morality. Teaching about religion should be distinguished from teaching morality, a related but separate issue. I agree with James Q. Wilson when he says:

> We are...convulsed by a debate over whether our schools should teach morality. Much of that debate is...misguided...because it is based on a misunderstanding of the sources of morality....A moral life is perfected by practice more than by precept; children are not taught so much as habituated. In this sense the schools inevitably teach morality...by such behavior as they reward or punish. A school reinforces the better moral nature of a pupil to the extent it insists on the habitual performance of duties, including the duty to deal fairly with others, to discharge one's own responsibilities, and to deter the satisfaction of immediate and base motives in favor of more distance and nobler ones.[1]

Following Wilson, we attempt to have moral classrooms. We try to model our teaching goals, provide an example of the values we want students to acquire. We also insist that they use them in class.

We work hard, and expect students to work hard. We come to class prepared and expect them to do likewise. We communicate with each other in the dignified ways traditionally associated with the classroom. We judge students on the basis of traits over they have some control--as opposed to ascribed groupings such as gender, race, sexual preference or physical anomaly. We expect them to do likewise.

We are concerned with empathy and honesty that, we believe, are fundamental to enduring secular philosophies and religious faiths. Students who try to bully, cheat or lie are counseled and, if necessary, punished. Negative reinforcement is not one of our primary methods, but we do not eliminate it either.

According to E. O. Wilson, a secular humanist and a founder of sociobiology (now called evolutionary psychology), religious institutions have "codified and put into enduring poetic form the highest moral values of a society."[2] However, they also have been a major contributor to human violence, war and horrors of many sorts. Students need to understand the full spectrum of effects of the religious view of life. We also need to help them become moral individuals regardless of religious background.

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[1] James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense*. New York: The Free Press, 1993, page 249.

[2] "Scientific Humanism and Religion," *Free Inquiry*, Spring, 1991, page 56. In the article Wilson summarizes the remarks made in 1986 when he was invited to be a scientific representative on the U. S. Roman Catholic Bishop's Committee on Human values.

Religion and Folk Belief. Folk belief includes various forms of occultism and presumed psychic phenomena that long predate the world religions. Both religion and science grew out of very early, primitive human attempts at understanding. These ancient magical assumptions remain significant in people's lives regardless of their religious views.

A complete understanding of any faith would include how it is practiced by the full range of members. However, we separate ancient problem-solving methods from our study of religion much as science teachers differentiate chemistry from alchemy.

When we study "miracles and magic" we want students to consider these primordial assumptions apart from basic religious world-views and ethical systems. Without this distinction, an instructor may tend toward bias. There is a strong temptation to talk about "superstitions" associated with other people's religions but fail to note similar phenomena existing within one's own. [3]

Religion and Methods of Persuasion. The ways religious people try to exercise influence are not different from the methods that non-believers use. Within almost all world religions there will be people who rely on intellectual persuasion, others who use propagandistic trickery and some who employ strong-arm methods--believing that the end justifies the means.

In sociology (critical thinking) we have a unit focused upon various methods of persuasion. And we have guidelines for spotting exploiters. These guidelines apply equally to secular and religious organizations--old and new.

By distinguishing between articles of a faith and means of propagation, students sort through some very complex issues. They can learn to be empathetic yet not abandon their critical thinking. As one specific example, our graduating seniors will know that the extremely friendly person who meets them on campus that first day may or may not have a belief system they want to get involved with. They will know that "being friendly" is a persuasion tool that any group can use.

Group Factual Assumptions & Scientifically-Oriented Scholarship. When discussing religion we try to clearly distinguish between beliefs that one group has about history--what has happened in the past--and factual data generated by academic research. Consider the life of Siddhartha Gautama, for instance. A. Basham in *The Wonder That Was India* says that there are only a few facts about the Buddha's life that scholars accept. These, he says, are as follows: Buddha

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[3] See "Distinction Between Religion and Magic," pages 22-25 in *Religion in Sociological Perspective* by Keith Roberts (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Second Ed., 1994).

> ... was the son of a chief of...a small tribe of the Himalayan foothills. He became an ascetic, and propounded a new doctrine which gained the support of numerous disciples. After many years of teaching...he died at the age of eighty some time between ...486 and 473 B.C.

The story of his life as told by his followers is much more detailed and colorful. One version begins in this manner:

> One night Mahamaya, chief queen of Suddhodhana,...dreamt that she was carried away to the divine lake...in the Himalayas....A great white elephant with a lotus flower in his trunk approached her, and entered her side....Next day the dream was interpreted for her by wise men--she had conceived a wonderful son, who would be either a Universal Emperor or a Universal Teacher.[4]

And, the story goes on. Probably students should know that for centuries many faithful Buddhists have accepted this story as being factually true--something that happened in history. They should also know that today many Buddhists along with non-Buddhists have a different view. This does not mean that the teacher calls these beliefs--or miracle stories in other religions-- "false." But, one should not confuse them with scientifically-oriented scholarship either. Basham says that "the story of [Buddha's] life as told by his followers...is infinitely more important [than the historic account because] it has influenced the lives of countless millions throughout the whole of Asia east of Afghanistan."[5] This fact does not keep us from presenting information in a historically honest way, however. For instance, say: "Many Buddhists (Jews, Christians, Moslems, Hindus, Daoists, or followers of Rev. Sun Moon) *believe* that. . . ."

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[4] A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1954, pages 256-57.

[5] Page 257.

"True Believer" Organizations: Questions to Ask

Introduction. One critical thinking (and scientific) principle is that all knowledge is limited. Human understanding--even that of the wisest among us--remains incomplete. It is subject to the limitations of our sensory organs, through which we receive impressions, and our brain that tries to make sense out of them.

Nonetheless, there are people who do not recognize human limitations. They think that they have found--or have been given--*the key to all knowledge*. They do not recognize limitations on their own wisdom or that of their leaders. At times almost all aspects of members' lives are focused upon the group and/or its leader. Believing they have *absolute truth*, they often try to recruit outsiders whose lives also are controlled.

Sometimes the word, *cult* is used to label such leaders and their followers. Sociologists often use such terms as *high demand* groups. We use the term *"True Believer "* taken from a book by that name written by Eric Hoffer (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951). Such organizations may be focused upon politics, commerce, psychotherapy, ecology, religion or other aspects of human living.

A controversial question concerning such groups is the degree to which leaders can "brainwash" people? Can they make individuals unthinking slaves? Can they alter fundamental thinking processes through emotionalism, repetitious chanting, hypnotism, physical yoga, and other presumed mind-altering techniques? Can people's thinking be restructured if they are allowed very little sleep and given non-nutritious food and only small amounts of that? And/or when subjected to repeated claims based upon faulty logic?

Using such techniques, can charismatic leaders--claiming to be all-knowing--turn admirers into near mental robots without the people knowing what is happening? Some experts such as Dr. Louis West, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California Neuropsychiatric Institute (Los Angeles) say yes. Many sociologists are doubtful. Psychologists are divided as a group.[1]

The issue is complex, and fortunately teachers and students do not need definitive answers. Our major job is to determine the kinds of organizations we want to become involved in ourselves. Do we want to devote our lives to a leader who claims to be all-knowing? The check list that follows is to evaluate an organization before one becomes emotionally involved. The questions focus on traits commonly found in members of True Believer organizations and their leaders.

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[1] West is on the editorial Advisory Board of the *Cultic Studies Journal*. For a sociological interpretation see "Religious Syncretism and Alternative Religious Movements," in *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective* by Lester R. Kurtz (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1995, pages 191-207).

Questions to Ask Ourselves before becoming deeply involved.

1. Does the group try to regulate member's love life? Determine who can be dated or whom one must marry? Are members told to use their bodies for recruiting? Is the promise of sex a recruiting tool?
2. Do leaders say or imply that breaking laws is OK if such acts serve group interests?
3. Are people expected to give up personal, educational or employment goals for "the good of the group"?
4. Is getting medical advice for ailments discouraged? Forbidden?
5. Are members threatened with great calamity if they leave the organization?
6. Is criticism of the group or its leaders condemned? Are people expected to be perpetually happy while engaging in organizational activities? Is criticism equated with treason or evil? Are members told to avoid negative thoughts about the organization and its leaders?
7. Are members pictured as superior to all other people? Are members made promises of rewards in this world (or in the afterlife) that no oneelse has?
8. Are members required to list their personal shortcomings? Provide information that later can be used to manipulate (perhaps blackmail) them?
9. Is critical thinking discouraged through emotionalism, or demands that group leaders be unquestionably obeyed?
10. Are members isolated from the outside world? Are members expected to live with one another? To work for organizational businesses for very low or no pay? To spend almost every evening at group meetings?
11. Is recruitment the major organizational goal? Are followers required to recruit others? Are they encouraged to use deception and lies if necessary?
12. Does life within the group resemble a military boot camp?
13. Is personal care of the leaders presented as a glorious activity?
14. Is one forbidden to question leaders and their decisions? Are followers discouraged from making personal decisions without consulting a leader?
15. Do leaders frequently criticize followers? Make them feel guilty for failing to fulfill unrealistic work quotas? For lacking faith or trust in the organization? For being insufficiently devout regardless of efforts?[2]

Teachers should avoid transferring personal biases. However, pupils need to think about organizations they find attractive *before becoming involved*. Young people are influenced by deceptive psychological ploys. We should prod them to think about kinds of authorities. Particular students may decide to support True Believer organizations, but we can help provide them with a critical thinking perspective.

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[2] Listings similar to this one are found in many publications. For example see "The Group Psychological Abuse Scale" by William Chambers and others published in *Cultic Studies Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1994, pages 88-117.

Part IV Teaching Tools

The Religious View of Life: Lesson Plans

OBJECTIVES

1. Enable student to develop a working vocabulary for discussing religion.
2. Enlarge students' conceptual basis for discussing matters relating to religion in a way that will not divide students from one another nor from their parents and religious authorities.
3. Have a starting lesson which will introduce units which focus on specific religions, historical time periods, or the study of new religions and cultism.

RESOURCES

The lesson is self-contained. It can be expanded by using the filmstrips, movies, video-tapes and library resources that are available to teachers in particular schools or through their local libraries. We use the principle of "durable concepts, current examples." Students are expected to provide many of the classroom illustrations through articles that they clip and the audio-visual programs that they watch.

In addition, local clergy may provide a valuable teacher resource. The leaders of many faiths have had academic training in world religions that most school teachers lack. They often can present historical material to young people in an effective way without proselytizing their own belief system. Further, by utilizing members of the local clergy the teacher gains protection from the charge that she or he is undermining the faith of the young.

DESCRIPTION OF CLASSES

Variations of this lesson are used in R-BHS's mainstreamed senior critical thinking class. They also are used in the Global Area Studies program which has open enrollment. Freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors of all academic levels sit next to one another and study together.

CLASSROOM PROCEDURES

Day One: Students read and work with Chapter One, "The Religious View of life." They can circle words that they don't know, ask questions and summarize ideas. When most of the students have completed their reading, ask, "What don't you understand?" Depending upon the class, discussion may continue for the rest of the class period. When discussion lags, hand out the Discussion Guide sheet. (See page 17.)

Day Two Assignment: Make a list of the first 15 terms found on the top of the discussion guide sheet. Define these 15 terms. (I encourage those students who have not yet learned to memorize effectively to make out flash cards--terms on one side and definitions on the other.)

Day Two In Class: Have students complete the list of terms and definitions (numbered 16-29). This can be done individually or in small groups. As students or groups complete their definitions, they select and answer one or more questions which they think are significant. Each group should produce at least one page of written work. Conclude the class period with general discussion.

Day Three Assignment: Students come to class prepared to complete lesson quiz.

Day Three In Class: Students ask questions and then complete the lesson quiz.

Conclusion: Although the lesson can end at this point, little may be gained unless students can relate unit ideas to their own lives. A writing project is recommended. Topics can include current religious warfare, abortion policies, or individual religious experiences. An essay topic based upon the latter might be: "Describe a religious person that you know without using her or his name. (It can be yourself.) What religious tradition (Eastern or Western) does this person follow? What is one religious ceremony that is very important to this person? How does the person's beliefs affect his or her actions." Or, "Provide a critique of the 'Religious view of life'."

ASSESSMENTS:

Grades are earned by: (1) Preparation and discussion, (2) Test results, and (3) A writing assignment. Each of these is weighted equally providing that students have had class time to prepare their essays.

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ANSWERS TO THE LESSON QUIZ

1. L
2. D
3. B
4. F
5. G
6. J
7. C
8. A
9. I
10. N
11. D
12. D
13. A
14. C
15. C
16. E
17. E
18. W
19. W
20. E
21. W
22. E
23. W
24. W
25. E

The Religious view of Life: Discussion Guide

TERMS TO KNOW (Underlined in text)

1. Divine entity
2. Religious truth
3. Occultism
4. Middle East
5. South Asia
6. Islam
7. Western religions
8. Hinduism
9. Buddhism
10. Eastern religions
11. Pantheism
12. Caste
13. Varna
14. Reincarnation
15. Transmigration of souls
16. Vedas
17. *Mahabharata*
18. *Ramayana*
19. Sutras
20. Muslims
21. Dualism
22. Jehovah
23. Allah
24. *Pentateuch*
25. *New Testament*
26. Jesus
27. Muhammad
28. Separation of church and state
29. Judaism

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What ideas do all religious people share? What unites Jews, Christians and Muslims with Hindus and Buddhists?
2. How do world religions differ from occultism?
3. About when did the concept of one universal god develop?
4. What world religions are considered Western? Eastern? In what modern nations are the birthplaces of the world's major religions found?
5. What major differences are found between Eastern and Western faiths?
    a. In regard to beliefs about the nature of God and relations to the universe?
    b. In regard to beliefs about the nature of the soul?
    c. In regard to codes of conduct and concepts of morality?
6. Why have people who followed Western religions been involved in religious wars over the ages more often than members of the Hindu or Buddhists religions? How have western leaders tried to combat this tendency?
7. Is the United States a nation of religious people? What is your evidence?
8. Which of the world's major religions are practiced in your community? What other faiths exist in the area?
9. Where are people now involved in wars that are based--in part--on religion?
10. Who can say, "I can be a good Hindu and a good Christian at the same time"? Who can not?
11. How might one's religious beliefs affect views on abortion?
12. Can an educated believer in one religion generally prove to an educated believer of another faith that he or she is wrong? Why, or why not?

Religious View of Life. Material Quiz

PART ONE: MATCH DEFINITIONS WITH TERMS. NOT ALL TERMS ARE USED.

1. Another name for the Torah; holy literature for the Jews.
2. A religion that grew out of Hinduism beginning about 500 BCE; a religion whose leaders stress that people must secure salvation through enlightenment.
3. The idea that the Divine and the universe are unseparated--are all one.
4. The founder of the Islamic faith.
5. That part of the *Bible* which Christians consider particularly significant.
6. Another name for the transmigration of souls.
7. The area of the world where Hinduism and Buddhism began.
8. The area of the world where the Jewish, Christian and Islamic faiths began.
9. The word Muslims use for *universal deity*.
10. The name of Hindu holy literature.

A. The Middle East
B. Pantheism
C. South Asia
D. Buddhism
E. *Koran*
F. Muhammad
G. The *New Testament*
H. Divine entity
I. Allah
J. Reincarnation
K. Jesus
L. The *Pentateuch*
M. Judaism
N. Vedas

PART TWO: MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS. SELECT THE ONE BEST ANSWER

11. What religious leaders probably would agree that "there is an eternal moral order that can be known to people, at least in part"?
    A. Jews and Christians.
    B. Hindus and Buddhists.
    C. Muslims.
    D. All of the above.

12. How can a Christian prove to a devout Buddhist that Christian concepts are correct? Through:
    A. Logical thought and avoiding fallacies.
    B. Scientific proof based upon experimentation.
    C. Both of the above are correct.
    D. No above answer is correct. Religious truth is based upon faith.

13. Which of the following is a concept shared by Jews, Christians and Muslims?
    A. Dualism.
    B. Transmigration of souls.
    C. Pantheism.
    D. All of the above are correct.

14. Followers of Islam look for the commands of the Divine in what source? The:
    A. *Gospels.*
    B. *Torah.*
    C. *Koran.*
    D. *Mahabharata.*

15. Which of the following existed before Judaism and Hinduism?
    A. Christianity.
    B. Buddhism.
    C. Occultism.
    D. Islam.

PART THREE: DISTINGUISH BETWEEN EASTERN AND WESTERN FAITHS. USE AN **"E" (EASTERN RELIGION)** FOR THOSE ITEMS ASSOCIATED WITH HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM; A **"W" (WESTERN RELIGION)** FOR THOSE WHICH ARE A PART OF JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY OR ISLAM.

16. There is a vast amount of holy literature which includes the *Vedas*, and many sutras.
17. There tend to be many different sets of rules that govern human behavior which vary according to sex, age, or social class.
18. Each faith--and often the divisions within each--are mutually exclusive. To belong to one means leaving another.
19. Frequent religious wars. Winning followers by the sword was common.
20. The bodies of the dead usually are cremated.
21. Each person is thought to have a unique soul which comes into existence at the beginning of pregnancy or sometime during pregnancy.
22. Souls are assumed to go from body to body.
23. The divine is seen as creating the world and interacting with people--but the creator and the created are separate.
24. Only humans have souls--no other creatures have them.
25. No concept of eternal punishment because of acts during a one lifetime.

Using *Analysis Materials* Booklet

Thinking About Religion is designed to encourage students to consider religious beliefs from an empathetic and critical thinking perspective as well as to demonstrate how many values they share with their secular classmates. This approach is appropriate for classrooms--public or otherwise--that have students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and faith orientations. The case studies, single-page analysis sheets and illustrations are designed to provide a focus for logical thinking and future study. We use them for:

1. **Authority analysis**. Who should we allow to influence us? Why? (Detailed worksheets on analyzing an authority are available from the Teachers' Press free of charge. Please request "Author Analysis Instructions." These were published in abbreviated form in the *Magazine of History*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Winter, 1991, page 60.)

2. **Oral or written reports**. Assign a student (or student team) to read a particular page and show how it relates to one of the unit lessons, if it does.
   a. In what respects does the reading repeat what is said in the text?
   b. What new information consistent with the text? Not consistent?
   c. Does the material conflict with class analysis?
   d. To what extent do you personally agree with the ideas? Would you study the original source? Why, or why not?

3. **Accelerated learning**. Challenge advanced students to secure the authoritative reference citations--for reading, studying, and reporting back to the class.

4. **Visual interpretation**. Can they see a body with its "departing soul" in the illustration given? Is it helpful in understanding? What other--perhaps better--drawings can they make?

5. **Lecture resources**. The case studies and single-page analysis sheets enable an instructor to go beyond the simple statements made for beginning learners in the text. The materials themselves can be used as lecture notes or as a starting point for further research. Dualism provides an example. We have found the simple description in Chapter I useful semester after semester. Nonetheless, it is only a starting point for understanding the concept. Several readings elaborate on the concept.

Using Primary Documents

Comparing Creation Stories

Have students read a creation story from an Eastern and Western faith. Have them read the first chapter of Genesis from the *Torah* and then study a Hindu creation story. An *Upanishads* creation account is found in *The Wisdom of China and India* edited by Lin Yutang, Random House, 1942, beginning on page 34. Ask them how the Western creation story illustrates a dualistic concept of the universe, and how the Eastern one illustrates a pantheistic concept. Then, use the stories to illustrate how people in the same religious tradition interpret their Scriptures differently. Compare and contrast literal and symbolic interpretations.

Comparing Flood Stories

Have students read the Noah flood story from Genesis, the first book of the *Torah* (*Bible*). It is found in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. Then, have them read "The Story of the Flood" from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. (An English version of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* with an extensive introduction by N. K. Sandars is available through the Penguin Classics series.) Ask students such questions as these:

1. To what part of the world do these flood stories relate? From a historian's standpoint, what rivers probably provided the basis for both of these stories?
2. One version of the flood story is more than 1,000 years older than the other. Which version of the sacred story do you judge to be the most ancient? What reasoning supports your judgment?
3. How are the stories alike? Different? How do you explain the similarities and differences?
4. What people likely would consider one story to be more "true" than the other?
5. What would a trained historian likely say if asked, "Which story is the most accurate?" How do you interpret these flood stories?

Comparing Birth/Death Stories of Gautama, Jesus and Muhammad.

Which story has the fewest supernatural elements? How can this difference be explained--in reference to the central beliefs of each religion? For example, have students read Chapter Two of Matthew in the *New Testament*. A popular Buddhist account of the birth of Siddhartha Gautama can be found in *The Wonder that Was India* by A. L. Basham, New York: Grove Press, 1954, beginning on page 257. The *Koran* consists of Muhammad's revelations as recorded in writing by others. Accounts of his birth and death are not found in the Koran, but they are readily available in many other sources.

Essay Test, Chapter One

Write two essays of about equal length. Describe two religious belief systems that are uniquely different one from the other. (You are not given credit for repeating information.) You may describe your own religion in one essay.

1. **Write both essays objectively and without overgeneralizing**. Do not editorialize. Use phrases such as "Members of the faith believe..." whether you are describing your own belief system or one with which you do not identify. When grading, I should not be able to determine if your personal belief system corresponds with the one you are describing.

2. **Support generalizations made with specific details**. We look for detailed, accurate information organized in logical categories. Essays are not just "lists of things."

3. **Devote about an equal amount of time to each essay.** Each will be evaluated individually, and the two grades will be averaged. Writing one extended essay and lacking time to complete the other will not result in a high grade.

4. **Concentrate upon human's perceived relations with the divine--belief systems and resulting rituals and ways of living.** Methods of proselytizing (getting others to accept one's beliefs) are not a part of this chapter.

5. **Avoid repeating information, arguing in circles and glittering generalities.** A long essay will not be scored highly if the student is just using repetition. "They believed that Allah was most powerful because none was stronger" is arguing in circles. The last part of the sentence repeats the first even though the word *because* has been used. Glittering generalities are nice sounding sentences that lack specific or clear meaning. "These people believe in many important things. Their religious ideas effect their lives every single day" are glittering generalities. No study is needed to write such nice-sounding words that lack specific content.

6. **Identify your authorities if they are not those used by your instructor**. If you are describing your own religion, for instance, say "According to ____ whom I interviewed. . .

7. **Make sure that all preparation material is in the assignment box before you begin writing!** Preparation is half of your unit grade, and essays are to be based upon memory.

Memorization and Drill!
Do They Belong in a Teacher's Tool Kit?

Memorization and Drill! These words have extremely negative connotations for many classroom teachers! Often they are accompanied with adjectives such as "mindless" or the word, *rote* used in a pejorative manner. As a beginning teacher 35 years ago, I had the firm impression that to succeed my students should do things other than engage in "rote memorization" and "mindless drill."

Reasons for moving away from memorization and drill are easy to understand. These methodologies frequently were over-used by teachers with no clear objectives. Students commonly lacked reasons for memorizing data or didn't know what drills were to accomplish. Afterwards, the facts and concepts were not used consistently and, therefore, soon forgotten

But educators over-reacted. We often went to opposite extremes, believing that any directed instruction was obsolete. Pupil-selected materials, we now were told, should be studied through active involvement. The message our students seemed to receive, however, was that they didn't have to study. The change in perspectives was so great that adolescents began reaching our high schools not knowing how to memorize, at times thinking they lacked this universal human skill.

How to respond? While still a fairly young teacher--and in the face of the prevailing ideology--I decided to trial-use memorization and drill as one of my pedagogical tools. (I taught non-tracked, required and multi-age classes in a public high school.)

At first I was fearful of student reaction and then surprised at their positive response. Many, I found, memorized quickly and well. These pupils were eager to display their talents, especially when they were a "ticket" to individualized projects.

Well-designed drills based upon mastery proved a great opportunity for cooperative learning. Skillful students could help others, and they enjoyed doing so. Academically challenged and younger students found they had better memory facilities than they had believed. Many achieved satisfaction finding they too could memorize, a skill useful in almost all classes. There were other benefits. A judicious amount of required memorization each unit--subsequently used and combined with many other activities--helps create a classroom work atmosphere. And, it united students in common tasks regardless of their academic, age or other differences.

In mastery-learning I use a combination of folkwisdom and techniques developed by social scientists such as B. F. Skinner. That is, small bits of information are memorized at a time. Students receive immediate and positive verbal feedback. Reviews are frequent, and memorized concepts and data are used throughout the course.

Today, the coaching analogy frequently is used, and I believe teachers should be good coaches. We should be empathetic, treat students as individuals. We should build upon their strengths and use their insights. But what winning coach begins by democratically determining plays? Eliminates drills? Says that play memorization is obsolete? Tells team members to just "express themselves" during a game?

I feel derelict if I fail to require all students to know fundamental concepts --and to use the means necessary to achieve that goal. Appropriate memorization and drill in the context of other activities are as important for classroom teachers as they are in athletic coaching, play directing, musical instruction, or learning to use a computer.

Students will accept the hard work that comes with formal instruction if they see that it leads to goals that make sense, if psychological awards are provided, if it is one classroom activity among many, and if memorized data is used. We should not abandon our discussions, dialogues, student reports, cooperative learning, individualized study and student participation in material selection. Neither should we dismiss traditional kinds of formal instruction because they were overused in the past or employed in illogical, self-defeating ways.

How to Memorize.

1. **Write out ideas** in various ways with only occasional glances at the text. Compose an outline, or compose rap, poems or songs. (Rhymed material is easily remembered.) Make flash cards for personal use and for classmates.
2. **Be physically active** by tracing words in the air with one's finger or talk into a tape recorder or in front of a mirror. Since teaching is a very good way to learn, become a tutor for classmates, younger siblings or other family members. Make a scrapbook, word puzzles, computerized drill, poster or other project.
3. **Review frequently** Tape data to the refrigerator or car dashboard. Keep a set of flash cards handy and refer to them while waiting for a bus or at other times. At times, play a review cassette recording instead of listening to music.
4. **Use associations**. Make funny words out of first letters. Use acronyms. Link an idea to a color, a particular person or an object. Visualize ideas. Group data so that you remember it as you remember a telephone number.
5. **Memorize only a few items for a short period of time**. Work on other activities, then review these memorized items before trying to learn more.
6. **Memorize when alert, not when tired**.
7. **Be proud of your memory and reward yourself.** Demonstrate your learning to a relative or guardian. Use it in class discussion! Take a break after a period of intense concentration. Reward oneself, perhaps by listening a favorite musical group for a short period of time.
8. **Don't give up** if success is not immediate. Get help! See a teacher.

Writing and Thinking

Are people better off in non-literate societies than in those that have a standardized script? Rousseau thought so. He said:

> Feelings are expressed in speaking, ideas in writing. In writing one is forced to use all the words according to their conventional meaning. But in speaking, one varies the meanings by varying one's tone of voice, determining them as one pleases. Being less constrained to clarity, one can be more forceful....All that is needed for quickly rendering a language cold and monotonous is to establish academies among the people who speak it. (*On the Origin of Language*, pp. 21-27. Translated by John J. Moran. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1966.)

Teachers, along with Rousseau, understand the importance of oral communication. We listen to students, orally counsel them, hold discussions, and lecture much of our professional lives. We also agree that writing changes communication, but isn't this a modification schooling is supposed to make? Internalizing grammar and logic helps pupils think in more organized ways. Writing is considered thought. It is a way through which pupils learn to deal with topics objectively, precisely and in a relevant manner. Ideas can be separated from the speaker, their merit judged apart from his or her personality. It's a tool that helps people move beyond fleeting, superficial opinions often stated as sweeping, self-evident truths. In sum, it helps teenagers--as it helps the rest of us--to deal with confusion and feelings of incompetency. Writing well is empowering! Consider Rousseau and how he has communicated to us!

* * *

We are proud of our students' writing on essay tests and unit application manuscripts. We recommend that *Thinking Logically, A Study of Common Fallacies*--or a similar manual--be available while they write. Manuscripts are proof-read before they are submitted. Students use classmates and family members as editors. When common errors are spotted during collection, a student is given correcting fluid to make corrections with the aid of a student editor.

Once accepted, we often have evaluated major papers using a cassette recorder. The human voice is expressive, as Rousseau said. This oral quality greatly aids an evaluator. She or he can read back sections of the paper, making detailed comments in less time than it would take to clearly write out comments helpful to students. Students then may rewrite. For years a mantra has been: "We'll regrade as long as you're willing to revise." Writing well is an art requiring repeated and guided practice.

The quotes from Rousseau and general focus come from Thomas F. Bertonneau's article "Epistemological Correctness in English 101" found in *Academic Questions*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 66-77.

Evaluating Student Progress

We recommend a variety of methods be used for evaluating student progress. One method we have found successful is the "1/3rd" system. One third of a students grade is based upon preparation/class discussion, one third on "considered thought" writing and one third on formal testing.

Pre-written, factual-recall, multiple-choice tests are not recommended if instructors have time for methods of evaluation that more fully stimulate pupil thinking. However, one's time often is limited. Therefore, consider ways to make multiple-choice tests something more than mindless guessing exercises (that effect how students review).

1. Print/distribute question stems ahead of time, using them for class and homework review. This procedures helps students rationally focus their study time.

2. In addition to requiring the "one best answer," encourage students also to write out their ideal answer for questions that they believe have inadequate choices. Construct an answer sheet layout appropriate for this purpose.

3. Give students time to write their explanations for missed questions when tests are returned. Have each quote from a specific authoritative source (probably the text or lecture notes) that led them to their "wrong" answer. If their explanation shows they had the appropriate knowledge when taking the test, give them the credit. In our experience this procedure is better than class discussions that often turn in to teacher/student battles with non-thinking students trying to receive credit for the mental efforts of their verbal classmates.

4. Give dissatisfied students one opportunity to retake the test after scrambling the questions and changing some. Average the first and second test scores.

To help students learn to write quality essay tests, make sure they know how to avoid simple fallacies. We developed the pamphlet *Thinking Logically* for this purpose. Also, have student groups construct model test questions and answers as a final review exercise. Questions must be answerable with a full page of writing that has no repetitions, glittering generalities or arguing in circles. Incorporate those questions that are well done into the test. Knowing that one of their questions may appear on the test is highly motivating to many students.

Contact us at **teacherspr@aol.com** for further information on how we have used these evaluation procedures over the years and student responses to them.

Addenda

Teachers' Press units are based on durable findings in history and the social studies. At the same time they are open-ended, as is all scholarly study. The items that follow are recently developed classroom exercises, readings or analysis materials, or pedagogical analyses based upon our experiences in the classroom.

Some of these efforts may prove durable, and they probably will be incorporated into future *Teacher's Manual* booklets. Others likely are ephemeral and will be discarded. Your suggestions as well as those of your students are welcome.

Shamanic Religion

From "What Is a Shaman?" by Piers Vitebsky, *Natural History*, March, 1997. pages 34-35. Nine additional 2-page articles on specific shamanic traditions also appear in the journal.

> Flying above...to the spirit world or descending into the underworld; [made] a skeleton, reassembled, and reborn; fighting evil spirits and sorcerers; and protecting...people from famine and disease--these are powers commonly claimed by shamans throughout the world.
>
> Shamanic beliefs do not constitute a single religion...although worldwide shamanic traditions approach reality and human experience in similar ways. In shamanic thinking, every element of the world..., whether human, animal, tree, or rock, is imbued with spirits. Spirits are conscious, often [human-like and they are] essences that underlie surface appearances.
>
> Events in the spirit world are believed to be intimately connected to everyday occurrences, particularly in...human health and fertility. By entering a trance state, and allowing his or her soul to venture into other worlds, the shaman can seek out the underlying causes of mundane events, and then fight, beg, or cajole the spirits to intervene in the affairs of the living.
>
> A shaman's soul-journeys are thought to take place [in a cosmos] with the earth at the center of various upper and lower worlds....
>
> [Believers commonly think shamanic power comes from going through difficult initiations that spirits demand.] The accomplished shaman generally acquires "spirit helpers," with whom he is thought to associate. These may be gods or ancestors but are commonly the spirits of powerful, agile, or cunning animals....Acquired with difficulty, shamanic powers can be lost again in battles with spirit enemies or through failure to perform the rituals properly.
>
> ...within their own cultures shamans are viewed as a combination of priest, doctor, social worker, and mystic....Rather than seeing them as mad, their clients believe that shamans have extraordinary insight into the cosmic processes governing health, food supply and fertility.

When Religion and Science Collide: The Kennewick Man

Facts of the matter: In 1996 two college students found a skull in shallow water along the Columbia River near Kennewick, Washington. Nearby hydroplane races had eroded the beach--which was Army Corps of Engineers land. The skull was taken to local authorities, and by the end of the day searchers found most of the rest of the skeleton. Through scientific testing it was determined that the skeleton is of a person who lived about 9,200 years ago. This individual, however, had typical Caucasoid (European-like) facial bone features. During his life he would not have looked at all like modern American Indians.

The skeleton now is in an Army Corps of Engineers vault. A Native American group demand that all study be stopped and the remains be reburied immediately. A group of eight scientists has filed a lawsuit to secure the remains for scientific study. (Kim Murphy. "Ancient Bones Raise Questions About Indian Ancestry." *San Francisco Chronicle*. Aug., 23rd, 1997, page A10.) *How can this problem best be dealt with? Can either/or thinking be avoided? If so, how?*

Case for the Native Americans: Armand Minthorn, a political and religious leader of the Umatilla Tribes says "From our oral histories, we know that our people have been part of this land since the beginning of time." "If this individual is truly over 9,000 years old, that only substantiates our belief that he is Native American" (Murphy). "Local Indian tribes led by the Umatillas [believe] research of their origins is an example of white man's 'disrespect.'" (M. L. Lyke. "Of spirits, skeletons, science: 'Kennewick Man' in Demand."*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Aug. 28th, 1997, pp. A1&10.)

Case for the Scientists: Robson Bonnichsen, head of the Center for the Study of the First Americans, states that this finding and similar ones raise questions requiring scientific study. "Do we have multiple different early populations?" he asks. "It poses a major new research frontier." (Murphy). Alan Schneider--a lawyer for Bonnichsen and the other scientists who have who have filed the lawsuit--argues, "What's going on here is not a question of whether Native Americans can believe and follow their traditions, but it's a question of whether all of the rest of the country can be required to follow their traditions" (Murphy).

Religion and Fundamentalism

This one-page statement comes from two articles in *culturefront*, Summer, 1994, Vol. 3, No. 2. See "The Ins and Outs of American Fundamentalism" by Randall Balmer, pp. 37-38 and "Libraries, Letter, and Literalism: The Fundamentalist Challenges" by Martin E. Marty, pages 39-41 & 76-77.

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Twelve booklets called *The Fundamentals* were published from 1910-15. Financed by Lyman and Milton Steward of Union Oil Company, they were designed to combat "evil" social changes as well as the lifestyles of non-Protestant immigrants. The Bible, the authors claimed, contains no factual errors, and it means exactly what it seems to mean. As examples, Jesus's mother was a virgin. His earthly body did go to heaven, and he is about to return to earth. Fundamentalists were those people who agreed.

> [Fundamentalists then] formed their own denominations in an attempt to distance themselves from the corruptions of modernism [they saw] everywhere around them. In addition they set up alternative institutions--Bible camps, Bible institutes, colleges, seminaries, mission societies, publishing houses--[to protect themselves from] a world they believed was both corrupt and corrupting....A siege mentality was pervasive. [They] were the righteous remnant in a fallen world. In order to set themselves apart they imposed all manner of [restrictions] on themselves and on their children, especially their daughters (Balmer, page 38).

Fundamentalist-like movements have developed in other Christian groups and in other religions for many of the same reasons. Members believe they are defending "pure" religious concepts of the past. Although they have little use for "corrupt" modern culture, leaders do use existing societal forms and technology to fight their "cultural wars." Think of Christian Rock groups, for example, and the many fundamentalist TV ministries that exist.

In spite of these common characteristics, Martin Marty reminds us that fundamentalists are of many kinds. Some likely are our neighbors and co-workers with whom we get along just fine. Specifically, we should not equate fundamentalism with terrorism. Being a fundamentalist doesn't mean one has "'guns in the basement.'"

Treating Another Person's Religion Fairly

Providing brief and fair descriptions of other people's belief systems is very difficult. In this reading James Loewen discusses typical textbook treatment of Native American religions. (From Lies *My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995, pp. 114-15.)

> *The American Way* describes Native American religion in these words: "These Native Americans [in the Southeast] believed that nature was filled with spirits. Each form of life, such as plants and animals, had a spirit. Earth and air held spirits too. People were never alone. They shared their lives with the spirits of nature." *Way* is trying to show respect for Native American religion, but it doesn't work. Stated flatly like this, the beliefs seem like make-believe.... Let us try a similarly succinct summary of the beliefs of many Christians today.
>
> These Americans believed that one great male god ruled the world. Sometimes they divided him into three parts, which they called father, son, and holy ghost. They ate crackers and wine or grape juice, believing that they were eating the son's body and drinking his blood. If they believed strongly enough, they would live on forever after they died.
>
> Textbooks *never* describe Christianity this way. It's offensive. Believers would immediately argue that such a depiction fails to convey the symbolic meaning or the spiritual satisfaction of communion.

Loewen concludes by saying that "taking native American religions seriously might require re-examination of the Judeo-Christian tradition. No textbook would suggest such a controversial idea."

Is Loewen being fair to the authors of *The American Way?* How would you briefly describe your own religion in a short paragraph? Would a person from a different faith likely understand your attachment on the basis of what you have written?

Religion and Women

Hebrew and Hindu religious traditions are older than Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. The former go back nearly 3,000 years (2000 BCE) when village and tribal societies were common in Western and Southern Asia. Domesticated animals were basic to the economies. Sheep, goats were herded. Cattle and (later) horses and mules were used to pull plows and for secondary products such as milk.

Before this time women provided most food, and their social/religious positions often were high. Gardening, gathering and baby care were compatible. Men gained status as economies changed. Being unburdened by pregnancy and infants, men could deal with large domestic animals (as well as travel widely in trading networks). As is often true today, power was equated with intellectual and moral strength, and communities became male-dominated. (See "The Women Warriors" by Lawrence Osborne in *Linguafranca*, Dec./Jan., 1998, pp. 50-57.)

Gautama, Jesus, and Muhammad were disturbed by at least some female restrictions. And, many early Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims were women. But efforts to bring about basic change were incomplete. Also, men reasserted authority as these religions became successful.

The struggle for gender equality in religion continues today with more success in some faiths than others. Islam is not a leader in this regard. Nonetheless, Muslim women from Iran, Syria, Bangladesh, Sudan, Turkey, India, Pakistan and elsewhere have issued "A declaration of the Rights of Women in Islamic Societies." It is quite similar to United Nations' 1967 "Rights of Women" Declaration and, perhaps, an indication of changes to come. (See the Fall, 1997 issue of *Free Inquiry*, vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 24-41.)

Social change is difficult, especially in religion. Religious people believe they are following divine commands, and outsiders in particular must proceed with care. Many devout people--some women as well as men--believe gender equality is ungodly and work to prevent it. Even though brute strength is of little significance today outside of sports--and, logically, not an indication of intellectual or moral vigor anyway--old ideas of "male superiority" still abound. If your family is religious, think about the struggle probably going on in your own faith.

Science and Religion: To What Degree Can They Coexist?

Stephen M. Barr is a physicist at the Bartol Research Institute, University of Delaware. His article, "Untangling Evolution" is in *First Things,* a conservative Christian journal (Dec., 1997, vol. 78, pp. 14-17). Barr says "Both faith and reason tell us that man has a spiritual soul, and therefore...purely naturalistic accounts of human realities are false. ...divine intervention has happened in human affairs, in particular in the miraculous events of salvation history." Outside of recent human history, however, he accepts scientific evolutionary explanations. Is his thinking logical? Consistent? (Paragraphing and paragraph ordering have been altered for clarity.)

> Creation means that God brings into existence all that is, and providence and design mean that He orders all that is. These concepts do no necessarily imply intervention....
>
> "Naturalism" can be a denial that anything whatever goes beyond the nature of material things. Such naturalism denies...even the possibility of divine intervention....But not all naturalism is of this kind. There is also a naturalism whose opposite is the prescientific view of nature that one finds among primitive peoples. This naturalism is based on true progress in knowledge of the physical world. Science finds no signs of divine intervention in the realm of inanimate matter. In astrophysics, geology, chemistry, or plasma physics, for example, one does not encounter the miraculous....
>
> The idea that God works His will through blind agents is as biblical as the story of Joseph in the Old Testament. The notion of blind natural forces came not from a rejection of God, but of Aristotle, and in particular of his teleological physics....
>
> What troubles most people about evolution is its application to human beings. One reason is that some think it degrading to have apes as ancestors. But it is not obviously more dignified to have come directly from slime....
>
> As long as we maintain the scriptural and philosophical truth that man has a spiritual nature, there can be nothing to fear in merely biological facts....We can be content, and should be content, to be guided only by the evidence.

Riverside-Brookfield High School

September, 19**

Dear parents or guardians:

I am delighted to have your son or daughter in my class. I sincerely hope the course will be interesting and profitable, and I ask for your help. It is important for your child's success that we have common understandings. Toward this goal, please note that I've included:

1. An outline of units we'll study and major topics covered in each.
2. A statement of my expectations. Students have received this sheet, and we've discussed it. I encourage you to examine it also.
3. An assignment sheet for our first unit. Students receive a similar one at the beginning of each unit. By monitoring it, you can determine daily obligations and your child's responses.

To the degree you are able, link current news stories and family history to what we are studying. Observe study procedures and scan daily written assignments. Young people need to know that supervising adults agree on educational goals and procedures.

I also encourage you to visit our class, and I'll help secure the permission necessary. Our room is your student's work area, and I cannot guarantee excitement. (Concentrated labor often is not.) However, you will observe educationally focused young people, and I'll be able to explain to you what they are doing and why.

If you have questions or want to receive unit assignment sheets on a continuing basis, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Brant Abrahamson